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Adventure

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by

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ND-1 . . . Beautifully matched engagement and wedding ensemble featuring 6 genuine diamonds set in rings of richly carved 14K Solid Yellow Gold. Both rings complete now only $29.75 — $1.00 down — $2.87 a month.

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Just $1.59 a mo.

ND-3 . . . Newly designed cross of 10K Solid Yellow Gold, set with 3 genuine diamonds; 18 inch 10K Solid Gold neck chain. Complete only $16.95 — $1.00 down — $1.59 a month.

(For purposes of clarity, illustrations of rings slightly enlarged.)

GENT'S INITIAL RING
Only $16.95
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This Xmas enjoy the advantages of shopping the ROYAL WAY! Send only $1.00 with your name, address, age, occupation. (If you have had credit accounts, mention where). All dealings confidential — no direct inquiries made. No red tape — NO C. O. D. to pay — NO extras or interest. **10 FULL MONTHS TO PAY — 10 DAYS TRIAL.**

ABSOLUTE SATISFACTION GUARANTEED — if not satisfied return selection and your $1.00 will be refunded immediately. If satisfied, pay balance in 10 small monthly amounts.

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Just $1.87 a mo.

2 Genuine Diamonds **Only $19.75**

ND-5 . . . The "Royal Princess." Charming, square model case of Yellow Rolled Gold Plate set with 2 genuine diamonds. Fully guaranteed movement. Matched link bracelet. Very special at $19.75 — $1.00 down — $1.87 a month.

17 Jewels

$29.75 The "Lady Bulova"

ND-9 . . . BULOVA'S most popular ladies model! Dainty, Yellow Rolled Gold Plate case; silk cord bracelet. 17 Jewels. $29.75 — $1.00 down — $2.88 a month.

ND-9A... As above, engraved, with bracelet. $33.75 — $1.00 down — $3.28 a month.

Just $2.38 a mo.

17 Jewel BULOVA **$24.75**

ND-6 . . . The BULOVA "Evangeline." Yellow Rolled Gold Plate case of charming simplicity. 17 Jewels; fully guaranteed. Matched link bracelet. A great Bulova value at $24.75 — $1.00 down — $2.38 a month.

Just $1.88 a mo.

Gent's 9 Jewel WALTHAM **$19.75**

ND-7 . . . The WALTHAM Premier "Granville." A new model by this famous American maker of fine watches. Yellow Rolled Gold Plate case. 9 Jewels. Genuine leather strap. Only $19.75 — $1.00 down — $1.88 a month.

Just $2.38 a mo.

Gent's 15 Jewel BULOVA **$24.75**
Curved to the wrist

ND-8 . . . The BULOVA "Dean." Streamlined Yellow Rolled Gold Plate case; triple link bracelet. 15 Jewel B-U-L-O-V-A radio-time movement. Fully guaranteed. $24.75 — $1.00 down — $2.38 a month.

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Only $22.00
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The Story of 2 MEN who NEEDED CASH

THIS MAN DOUBTED:

He said: "Yes, I am broke. I am really terribly hard up. I haven't a cent of extra money for anything. I wish I knew where to get some. I haven't a bit of faith in anything. I am a failure and my luck is terrible."

DO YOU need money to pay the rent—to meet nagging bills—or to clothe and feed the family? Are you hard up for ready cash and obliged to deny yourself many comforts or even necessities? Are you working for such small wages that you can't make ends meet? Then you'll be interested in the experiences of these two men.

THIS MAN ACTED:

He said: "Yes, I need money. I am tired of penny pinching. Your generous offer sounds good to me. It costs nothing to investigate—I have everything to gain. I am going to send my name and find out just what you have to offer me."

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Make Up To $60.00 in a Week

I'll help you start at once and back you up to the limit. Here's a bona fide cash-getting idea you may never have heard of before—a unique and utterly different way of getting the cash you need. With my plans I have "saved the day" for hundreds who were at their wit's end. Not just another clock punching job . . . no back-breaking labor. Even spare time nets up to $5.00 in a day . . . full time up to $60.00 in a week. **Brand-new Ford Tudor Sedans given as bonus to producers besides cash profits.** Good opportunities open. You don't require any previous experience and you don't risk any of your own money. Think of being prosperous again. Just send me your name for free facts.

Enjoy Big Cash Earnings

If you are tired of slaving for small pay, here's your chance to break away and make big money. You can even start in your spare time—see the business grow—have cash in your pocket—be independent. Think of the joy of being a successful business person in your own locality with big, year 'round earnings of your own. Earnings begin at once, the very first day.

STARTED PENNILESS

6½ Months Later Was Worth $1,200

"Only six and a half months ago I started with your company without a penny to my name, and today (I just finished my balance) I am worth a little more than $1,200.00. I can hardly believe it myself—such a success in so short a time! But it's the truth. Many a day I made from $15.00 to $20.00 clear profit. Your Happy Hustler, Hans Coordes, Nebr.

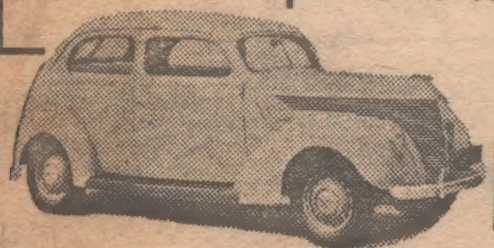
LOOK AT THESE UNUSUAL EARNINGS

I have a flood of glowing letters from prosperous, successful men and women telling of unusual earnings they have made with my plans. L. P. Boyne, La., made $67.20 in a week. Mrs. H. H. Hosick, Nebr., made $41.75 the first week. Steve Witt, Mo., made $21.59 in a day. Albert Becker, Mich., $100.00 in a week. George W. Creed, Ohio, $95.00 in a week. These exceptional earning reports show the amazing money-making possibilities of my offer to you.

SEND NO MONEY—JUST SEND NAME

I send everything you need. You positively don't risk a penny of your money. There is nothing complicated or puzzling about my money-making methods. You will be the judge and decide for yourself if the earning possibilities are satisfactory. Just give me a chance to explain the facts. It costs you nothing to find out. Send name on coupon or penny postcard. DO IT NOW!

ALBERT MILLS, Pres.
6502 Monmouth Ave.,
Cincinnati, Ohio



NEW FORDS
Given as a Bonus

A FEW WEEKS LATER

Now look at these two men as they meet on the street. One is a success and the other is a failure. One had the courage to try; the other had no faith—he was a doubter—he is still in hard luck. The man in the car is a success because he was willing to listen to reason. He was not afraid to send his name and get the facts. When he saw my public announcement stating I would give a brand new Ford Tudor Sedan to producers as a bonus in addition to cash earnings, he believed in my sincerity. Why don't you, too, investigate?

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Albert Mills, President
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Rush me free facts. Tell me how I can start at once and make up to $60.00 in a week with a permanent Coffee Agency of my own. Also send me your Ford Automobile offer. This will not obligate me.

Name .....

Address .....

.....

(Please Print or Write Plainly)

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Vol. 100, No. 2 for December, 1938 Published Once a Month

Bayou Gold (a novelette) . . . . . WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN 9
Swords under the moon, and dead men's gold, and a lean ship flying the Black Roger—these are the heritage of fighting Flag McCord, who comes back to claim his birthright.

Enemy Boots . . . . . H. BEDFORD-JONES 50
Snug and warm, the Hessians toasted the Yuletide in Trenton town—and across the bleak Delaware a freezing man in tattered blue growled, "Ding their swords. I aim to ketch me a pair of shoes this night!"

Blackcock's Feather (4th part of 5) . . . . . MAURICE WALSH 59
Knee to knee, pike against halberd, the clans hasten the dying of the English horse, and David Gordon twists in his trap.

Cotton Top . . . . . WALT COBURN 78
"I got a horse between my legs, whiskey in my belly, an' a six-shooter in my hand again. I'm killin' Bob Lint where I cut his trail!"

A Lamp-post for the Viscount . . . . . GEORGES SURDEZ 90
The Chleuh tribes charged, and men of the Legion were dying on the sands of the Jebel-Maskri—and de Barrois, the snob, the gentleman who was a joke, rode out to his last campaign.

Old Gus Goes Swilin' . . . . . BERT SHURTLEFF 100
"Listen, Newfie," roared Old Gus, on the ice-pack, "where I coom from, dis col' is yoost child play. On'y dem blue-nosers from New'f'n'lan' is sof' enough to min' dis weather."

Close to Death (a fact story) . . . . . MAJOR CALVIN B. CARTER 109
Three white men against a mad *datu* and his army in the Philippines—and to move a finger meant to lose a head.

The Camp-Fire . . . . . *Where readers, writers and adventurers meet* 116

Ask Adventure . . . . . *Information you can't get elsewhere* 119

Trail Ahead . . . . . *News of next month's issue* 127

Lost Trails . . . . . *Where old paths cross* 4

Cover by I. B. Hazelton
Headings by I. B. Hazelton and George Wert
Howard V. L. Bloomfield, Editor

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"GOODBYE WORLD! MY SHIP FADED INTO THE NIGHT!"

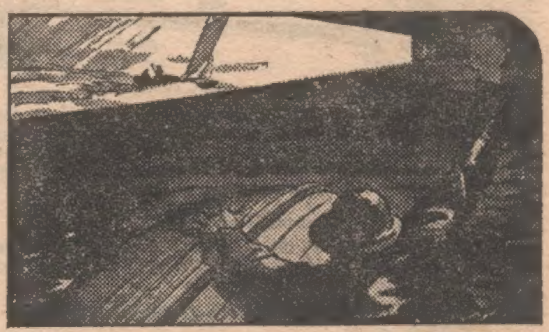
OVERBOARD IN STORM, YACHTSMAN CLINGS TO CAPSIZED DORY AS SLOOP HOLDS COURSE

❶ "My 40-foot sloop was footing it up Long Island Sound like a scared cat before a stiff sou'-west breeze," writes Tom Meyer of 280 Bronxville Road, Bronxville, N. Y. "At midnight...

❷ ...off Smithtown Bay, it really began to blow. My partner, Larry Starr, was asleep below, and I gave the tiller to a friend who had done no sailing before, so I could get the dinghy in on deck before it got away from us. Then, with the darn thing half-way on board a big comber pounded over the stern, swept my feet out from under me and overboard I went, weighted down with boots and oilskins. I still clung to the dinghy, but its line had parted and my ship faded quickly into the black night!

❸ "The lad at the tiller didn't know how to bring the ship about, and although he would wake Larry, they'd be too far away to ever find me in that roaring darkness.

"I was growing numb with cold. I couldn't hang on much longer. I rolled against the gunwale of the dinghy for a fresh grip on the world that was slipping away from me. Something hard dug into my side... the flashlight in my pocket! Soaked, though it was, here was a chance!



❹ "I pressed the switch. A finger of light stabbed through the storm. Time dragged on as I played the light about me. I cursed my shipmates. 'Why can't the fools see my light?' and then...the beam caught the white sail! I screamed for joy. An arm waved encouragement. Minutes later, thanks to those *fresh* DATED 'Eveready' batteries that kept working under the toughest conditions imaginable, I was warm and happy in my own bunk on my own ship, our Block Island cruise resumed.

(Signed) Tom Meyer"

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START
$1260 to $2100 YEAR

MANY 1939
APPOINTMENTS EXPECTED

Railway Postal Clerks

Railway Postal Clerks get $1,900 the first year regular, being paid on the first and fifteenth of each month. ($79.17 each pay day.) Their pay is automatically increased yearly to $2,450. Advance may be had to Chief Clerk at $2,700 a year. ($112.50 each pay day.)

3 Days On—3 Days Off—Full Pay

Railway Postal Clerks on long runs usually work 3 days and have 3 days off duty or in the same proportion. During this off duty their pay continues just as though they were working. They travel on a pass when on business. When they grow old, they are retired with a pension.

City Mail Carriers, Post Office Clerks

Clerks and Carriers now get $1,700 the first year on regular and automatically increase $100 a year to $2,100 and $2,300.

File Clerk—Clerk

Open to Men—Women 18 to 50. Entrance salary $1,260—$1,440 year. Appointments as File Clerks and Clerks in the Departments at Washington, D. C., are made from this examination.

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Address .....

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or the fates. For the benefit of the friend you seek, give your own name and full address if possible. All inquiries along this line, unless otherwise designated, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, every inquiry addressed to "Lost Trails" will be run in three consecutive issues.

Hans A. Schnell, 253 Cumberland St., Brooklyn, wants word of his brother Fred Schnell, last known address Middlesex Hospital, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Gilbert Thompson, about 43, Swede, former member of Medical Corps 89th Division during 1917-1918. Last heard of he was living in Clouqet, Minn., in 1925. Anyone knowing of him please write to James C. McKinney, CO. 3855 C.C.C., Groveland, Calif.

Anyone who was in the 4th Casual Company, Camp Lewis, Washington, please write to Clarence Parker, Gerber, California.

James P. FitzGerald, serving about the *U.S.S. West Virginia* in 1933, write to K. Downes, 231 George St., Peterboro, Canada.

Information desired regarding James Conroy Kennedy, originally from Wisconsin, last heard from in 1929 while working on construction project near Barranquilla, Colombia, S.A.—A. Kennedy, 2209 Barnard St., Savannah, Ga.

Wanted: Address of Alfred Willy, who was at Los Zanos, Philippine Islands, in 1915, Alfred W. Southwick, 78 Burnside Avenue, Newport, R. I.

Emile Cuschina, of San Jose, California, get in touch with old friend Bill Gianella, Marysville, Calif.

(Continued on page 6)

I WILL SEND MY FIRST LESSON FREE

It Shows How I Train You at Home in Your Spare Time for a

GOOD JOB IN RADIO

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute,
Established 1914

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Clip the coupon and mail it. I will prove I can train you at home in your spare time to be a RADIO EXPERT. I will send you my first lesson FREE. Examine it, read it, see how clear and easy it is to understand—how practical I make learning Radio at home. Men without Radio or electrical knowledge become Radio Experts, earn more money than ever as a result of my Training.

Get Ready Now for Jobs Like These

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to $5,000 a year. Fixing Radio sets in spare time pays many $200 to $500 a year—full time jobs with Radio jobbers, manufacturers and dealers as much as $30, $50, $75 a week. Many Radio Experts open full or part time Radio sales and repair businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, and pay up to $6,000 a year. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loud speaker systems are newer fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio. Read how they got their jobs. Mail coupon.

Why Many Radio Experts Make $30, $50, $75 a Week

Radio is young—yet it's one of our large industries. More than 28,000,000 homes have one or more Radios. There are more Radios than telephones. Every year millions of Radios get out of date and are replaced. Millions more need new tubes, repairs. Over $50,000,000 are spent every year for Radio repairs alone. Over 5,000,000 auto Radios are in use; more are being sold every day, offering more profit-making opportunities for Radio experts. And RADIO IS STILL YOUNG, GROWING, expanding into new fields. The few hundred $30, $50, $75 a week jobs of 20 years ago have grown to thousands. Yes, Radio offers opportunities—now and for the future!

Many Make $5, $10, $15 a Week Extra In Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, in addition to our regular Course, I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets; show you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and directions that make good spare time money—$200 to $500—for hundreds, while learning.

How You Get Practical Experience While Learning

I send you special Radio equipment; show you how to conduct experiments, build circuits illustrating important principles used in modern Radio receivers, broadcast stations and loud-speaker installations. This 50-50 method of training—with printed instructions and working with Radio parts and circuits—makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make good money fixing Radios while learning and equip you with a professional instrument for full time jobs after graduation.

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I am so sure I can train you to your satisfaction that I agree in writing to refund every penny you pay me if you are not satisfied with my Lessons and Instruction Service when you finish. A copy of this agreement comes with my Free Book.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act Today. Mail the coupon now for sample lesson and 64-page book. They're free to any fellow over 16 years old. They point out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tell about my training in Radio and Television; show you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

J. E. Smith, President, Dept. 8NS9, National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

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"I have been doing nicely, thanks to N. R. I. Training. My present earnings are about three times what they were before I took the Course. I consider N. R. I. Training the finest in the world."—BERNARD COSTA, 201 Kent St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

MAIL COUPON NOW!

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J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 8NS9
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send the sample lesson and your book which tells about the spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts. (Please write plainly.)

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Size Rim	Tires	Tubes
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29x4.50-20	2.35	1.05
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28x4.75-19	2.45	1.25
29x4.75-20	2.50	1.35
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.25
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.25
6.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	2.25	1.35
6.50-17	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19	3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20	3.45	1.55
32x6.00-21	3.65	1.55
32x6.50-20	3.75	1.75
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Size	Tires	Tubes
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31x4	2.95	1.25
32x4	2.95	1.25
32x4	2.95	1.25
34x4	3.25	1.35
32x4½	3.35	1.45

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(High Pressure)

Size	Tires	Tubes
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33x5	2.95	1.75
34x5	4.25	2.25
32x6	7.95	2.95
30x8	9.95	4.45

TRUCK BALLOON TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
6.00-20	$3.75	$1.65
6.50-20	4.45	1.95
7.00-20	5.95	2.95

ALL OTHER SIZES

Size	Tires	Tubes
33x4½	$3.45	$1.45
34x4½	3.45	1.45
30x5	3.65	1.65
33x5	3.75	1.75
35x5	3.95	1.75

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Size	Tires	Tubes
7.50-20	$6.95	$3.75
8.25-20	8.95	4.95
9.00-20	10.95	5.65
9.75-20	13.95	6.45

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SEND ONLY $1.00 DEPOSIT on each tire ordered. ($3.00 on each Truck Tire.) We ship balance C. O. D. Deduct 5 per cent if cash is sent in full with order. To fill order promptly we may substitute brands if necessary. ALL TUBES BRAND NEW—GUARANTEED—

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American School, Dept. AC-940, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

(Continued from page 4)

Wanted—word from Otto Meyne, formerly Battery D, 7th Field Artillery, Madison Barracks, N. Y. Nevin Hayes, 1012 Wood St., Wilkinsburg, Pa.

John V. Gatton, now 27, last heard from leaving Joplin, Mo., for New Orleans, in 1931. Notify mother, Mrs. Ida Gatton, Danvers, Montana.

Word wanted of Jack Oliver Hanlon, who left his home in Seattle, Wash., Oct. 23, 1932, and was a regular reader of Adventure. Notify his mother, Mrs. W. F. Hanlon, 2321 Fairview No., Seattle, Wash.

I would like to get in touch with Edwin P. Ford, ex-marine, *U.S.S. New Mexico*. Believe him to be in Baltimore, Maryland. H. C. Price, Route 1, Box 380, Modesto, California.

Duane William Peterson, was last heard from in Fort Bayard, New Mexico. Was formerly with Coast Artillery Corps—7th, Fort Scott, San Francisco. Mrs. Justina Rennie Cranz, 6298 Del Valle Drive, Los Angeles, California, wishes words of him.

S. F. Wilson, U. S. Navy, would like to know the whereabout of Harvey Ingersoll last heard of living at 509 Ganson Street, Jackson, Michigan. Write to him at 5529 Cranshaw, Detroit, Michigan, or U.S.S. Bridge, Mare Island, California.

Louis P. Stilwell, 100 Buckingham Rd., Brighton 1, Sussex, England, would welcome any news of his buddy, Louis Hudson, heard of in Lewes, England in 1918 and later New York.

Wanted: Address of Frank S. Jones. Was in Laona, Cal., then Los Angeles, when last heard from. Communicate with E. C. Wilcox, Yellowstone Park, Wyo.

Word wanted of Calvin William (Slim) Brown, once of Ranger, Texas. By Isaac Simmons, Bloom, Kansas.

Ralph Cornwall or Cornwell, formerly of "American Legion" in Canadian Army, transferred to Intelligence service, reported caught in Germany and shot. Lately reported living. Old buddy, Wayne G. Putnam, R.R. 3, Dayton, Ohio, would like word.

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BAYOU GOLD

A novelette

By WILLIAM CHAMBERLAIN

Prologue

A HUNDRED and forty years have marched on over the head of the dozing bayou since that hot afternoon when Arble Thine's fighting men gave the river castle back to the buzzards and the crocodiles. Times have changed with the march of the years. John Bradoon, red of face and hard of eye; the castle, where gathered the thousand brave men and the thousand rogues who paid allegiance to the Brotherhood; the tall ships anchored at the river's mouth and flying the Black Roger at their main—all these have gone.

Only the bayou remains. Only the bayou is unchanged. Only the bayou remembers.

There is much for the bayou to remember; much for it to brood upon as it winds sluggishly through the hot shadows of the cypress swamps.

The bayou is old—old and somberly evil, as evil as it was on that day when John Bradoon died as the price of a woman's perfidy.

FAR up, in the brassy and pitiless dome of the sky, a buzzard hung on motionless wings. A second speck joined the first—a third came. Evil birds waiting for the feast.

Greasy smoke, from the Negro quarters which burned at the swamp's edge, crawled across the sky. The red-faced man, with the patch hiding one of his gray eyes, laughed harshly as he stood between his guards.

"Ye'll hang me? I do not doubt it, Arble Thine! Ye will burn me first? Nor do I doubt that, ye white-livered spawn of a swamp toad! An', when ye have done, Dirty Nose, ye will go away from the river castle as poor as when ye came to it!"

So John Bradoon spoke.

He threw back his head and laughed—a hard, tough man with no fear in him. Under the gray-bearded oaks of the castle a hundred men waited with pistols thrust through their belts and cutlasses swinging at their sides—a hundred hard men with profane voices and scarred faces. Other men lay scattered about the acre of clearing, lay like tumbled heaps of gaudy clothes, while their eyes stared straight up into the blue sky.

The squat man in front of John Bradoon said in his whining voice: "We're of the Brotherhood, me an' you, John Bradoon. I have no wish to hurt ye, if ye will tell us where ye have hidden the gold."

The watching circle of men shifted uneasily as John Bradoon's harsh laughter slapped out. They muttered among themselves and knew, even as they waited for the big man's reply, that the secret of the river castle would go down into his grave with John Bradoon.

"Where is the gold, Dirty Nose? Ye ask me? Now that is good! Ask that she-cat who led ye here, Arble Thine! Maybe she can tell you!"

Arble Thine's rat-like eyes darkened with anger and the sweat gathered in little droplets on his unshaven jowls. He stepped forward suddenly and swung the open palm of his hand at the bound man's face.

"One more chance I will give to ye, John Bradoon. Where have ye hidden the gold?"

"Ye would like to know, Dirty Nose? Then sit on your hunkers and guess—guess until the eyes of you drop out like grapes!"

Arble Thine's voice lifted crazily. "Then I'll burn ye, John Bradoon! I'll burn ye until your knees crack like rotten sticks and your fingers curl up crisp in front of your eyes!"

"Burn on, you mewing monkey! And, before I die, I'll spit on ye!"

Arble Thine whirled on the waiting men, his fat face thinned by the madness of his anger. A mouthful of hot wind crept across the swamp to stir the festoon of gray moss which hung from the branches of the oaks. There was a smell of death in the air as Arble Thine lifted his arms.

IT was dusk when they had finished with John Bradoon. The brassy sun had gone and dark, weeping clouds had piled themselves against a crimson moon. The castle was quiet now, except for the rising wind which moaned across the swamp.

The men who had killed John Bradoon stood in little groups among the trees while they talked in awed whispers. John Bradoon had kept his promise. The secret of the gold had died with him and, using his last breath, he had cursed Arble Thine and the woman who had brought him to his death.

"Where is the gold?"

"Ask . . . that . . . she . . . . devil . . . . Arble . . . Thine!"

So had he died.

There were no buzzards now, but tomorrow they would come to dip and soar above the feast. Bats flitted through the coming night on ghostly wings, and the piles of black clouds reached thin fingers across the moon. Far away, deep in the bayou, a crocodile slid into the water with a muffled and sinister splash.

The groups of men about the clearing stirred uneasily. There was something oppressive about the velvety quietness of the night; it was filled with the menace of their own wickednesses.

Close to the rearing piles of stone, which were the gray walls of the river castle, the scarlet flames of a bonfire leaped and twisted against the shadows.

"Heh! Heh! A-he-ho!"

A gigantic Negro, naked to the waist, squatted in front of the fire and crooned in a hoarse voice which lifted above the wind. The chant grew more wild; it echoed against the walls of the swamp and came back, utterly mournful.

Men started nervously and dropped unsteady hands to the knives at their belts as they turned to look. The Negro had risen to his feet. He was silhouetted like a huge bat in front of the dancing flames, legs spread wide and arms waving crazily above his head. He laughed in a wild uplift of sound as he swayed back and forth.

"Listen to me, white men! White men, you listen to what old Corkle Soor's goin' to tell you!"

The flames raced higher behind him and red shadows danced with a ghoulish merriment on the hanging fronds of the moss. Out in the night the bayou chuckled obscenely to itself.

"I speak truth to you, white men! You want gold! Hah! You will not find gold, but you will find something else! I tell you that you will find death . . . death. . . Heh-heh-heh!"

His gigantic shoulders swayed back and forth in front of the fire in a wild rhythm. He mumbled gibberish. Then his voice lifted again in a wild chant.

"The years are like clear glass to Corkle Soor! Through the years I can see a man coming—a hard man who is not afraid! John Bradoon's blood flows in that one's veins! Heh! Such a man will hang Arble Thine's spawn at the end of a long, long rope! I can see it, white men! Old Corkle Soor can see it through the years! Not until then will John Bradoon's gold be found! Heh! Yes!"

A shot spanged soddenly across the night and the big Negro straightened, throwing his arms out wide. For a moment he stood there looking; then jumped across the fire and the darkness swallowed him. His mocking voice came back in a long banshee wail.

"Ho . . . a-he-ho . . . eeeho!"

CHAPTER I

THE CROCODILE RING

FLAG McCORD sat behind the iron-topped table and yawned over his brandy and thought what the hell.

A week ago he had been sitting pretty, he reflected. A major general with a hundred and fifteen brown soldiers under his command—pretty good soldiers, too. Then the revolution had fizzled out and they had stood Don Seguro up against a wall and filled him full of bullets and, if there hadn't been a banana boat a half a dozen miles down the coast, they would have dished Flag McCord up the same way.

Now he was back in New Orleans with nothing but his clothes and a Luger in a shoulder holster and a desire for a lot of peace.

It was early yet. Not more than a half a dozen customers sat about the tables in Mother Huguet's café. A mulatto in a soiled white coat stood behind the bar and swiped lazily at the wood with a damp rag, pausing now and then to wipe his forehead with the same cloth. A hollow-chested youth sat at the battered piano and picked out tinny discords with nicotined fingers. Deep in the heart of the old city a clock struck the hour with measured and booming strokes.

". . . seven . . . eight . . . nine . . ten!"

McCord finished his brandy and tapped on the table top with the big ring which he wore on the third finger of his left hand. The mulatto heard and came shuffling across the floor with a bored look on his heavy features.

"Brandy," McCord told him.

A girl, with bleached hair and a faintly pretty face, came through the door from Cachelot Street. She paused to look about her for a moment and then sat down at a table across from McCord's. He watched her idly while she fixed her face. The mulatto came back with the brandy.

"Two bits," he said.

McCord took one of his two remaining coins and spun it across the table; then sat back again, twisting the heavy ring

on the finger of his left hand. He squinted a little through the smoke of his cigarette as he stared at it. It was a massive thing—a crocodile rudely carved out of dull green gold and bent into a circle, tail to mouth. The two yellow stones which formed the reptile's eyes seemed to wink back at him.

He had always believed that the talisman had brought him luck, but he hadn't had much luck down south, he decided. Then he remembered the banana boat and grinned crookedly to himself and settled the ring back into its place. He might have to hock it tomorrow in order to eat, but tomorrow was another day.

THE girl at the next table was watching him; he squinted at her and then turned away to roll himself a fresh cigarette. She got up slowly and came across the half a dozen feet to sit at his table and rest her chin on her hands. Not bad looking, as blondes went, he thought.

She said: "Hullo, sailor. Just get in?"

"Sure," he told her. "My name bane Yonson. I'm yust coome from old country."

"Funny, aren't you?"

"Maybe," McCord said indifferently. "What's on your mind, sister?"

She smiled and reached up to pat her hair. There was something here that wasn't right, McCord decided. There was a sort of tight excitement about the girl that hadn't been there when she had walked in ten minutes ago. He guessed suddenly that it was the ring—guessed it by the way she kept her eyes away from his left hand. She'd been interested enough in that ring a few minutes ago.

"On my mind?" she asked, opening her eyes innocently.

McCord's own gaze narrowed and a hard note crept into his voice. "Sister, if you're just looking for company I don't want to play. If it's something else that's bothering you, come to the point."

Her upper lip curled a little. "Tough, aren't you?"

"Sure." He closed a square-knuckled fist and laid it on the table so that the yellow eyes of the crocodile stared up at her. She tried not to look but couldn't help herself. McCord said: "That ring means something to you, sister. What?"

She laughed, but her laughter lacked conviction.

"Not a thing, sailor," she told him. "Not a thing! I just thought it was sort of pretty. That's all. I'll tell you what, sailor. I'll give you five dollars for it."

"No sale," McCord said, yawning.

"Ten?"

It was more than he would get in a hock shop tomorrow, McCord thought sourly. He had half a notion to give it to her and let the thing go at that. The hollow-chested youth was hammering at the piano again and the tinny plink-plank irritated McCord. Mother Huguet, a fat and shapeless figure, waddled through a doorway at the rear and stood with her arms folded while she stared at her customers. Insects droned about the yellow lamps.

"Fifteen, sailor," the girl said. She moistened her painted lips with the tip of her tongue.

McCord was suddenly tired of it. Drunk or crazy, he thought. Maybe both. He sat back and finished his brandy and wondered why they killed people like Don Seguro and let that piano player live. Mother Huguet was padding forward toward his table and the girl got up suddenly. She stood there staring at him for a long moment and then turned. She was almost running when she reached the door and then the night swallowed her.

Mother Huguet grunted as she lowered herself into the chair which the girl had just vacated. McCord had known Mother Huguet for a long time now; they were friends. He jerked his head toward the door which opened out into Cachelot Street.

"Who is she?"

The old woman pursed her lips and scowled.

"Don' know," she answered. "Sometime she ees come een here weeth wan—w'at you call tough wans, eh?"

McCord turned his left hand up so that the ring was beneath her nose.

"Take a look at it, *cherie*."

"W'at?"

"The ring, you fat cow!"

"Sure! Sure! I 'ave seen those piece of brass before thees. Why should I look at eet?"

"Forget it," McCord grunted. "Maybe it's my imagination. Have a drink, darlin'. It's on the house."

"Crazee," Mother Huguet murmured. She drained her brandy and waddled off to wave her hands and shriek at the piano player. He grinned at her, head over his shoulder, and hit the keys with both fists.

IT was eleven-thirty when McCord pushed himself away from the table and went out into Cachelot Street. He was a little drunk and that pleased him, because it helped to erase the memory of how Don Seguro's face had looked on that morning when they had led him out to the firing squad. For a moment McCord stood with the night hot against his forehead and the smells of the city strange in his nostrils. He had been away two years. He turned, then, and went toward the river, humming under his breath.

An ancient part of the city here. Rough cobbles twisted his ankles and old houses leaned crazily against the stars over his head. He passed a shuttered window and heard the faint sound of a woman singing.

The yellow lights of Thramms Street were still a block away when a dark figure stepped out of a doorway in front of him. Instinctively McCord's hand half lifted toward the Luger in its shoulder holster; then he thought better of it and allowed his arm to drop.

A man said: "That's better, friend. All easy an' nice, huh?"

He stepped out of the shadows. McCord caught the glint which light makes along a gun barrel and reflected that it was just as well that he had let the Luger be. Another man ranged alongside of him and a hand slid inside his coat and took the Luger away.

"A hell of a welcome home after being away for two years," McCord said sourly. "The name's Flag McCord. You wouldn't have been looking for somebody else?"

"Maybe," the first man told him. "Come on. We're goin' to have a nice, quiet talk."

"I can hardly wait," McCord said in a morose voice.

They turned him and went back down Cachelot Street, walking close so that he could feel the pressure of their shoulders against his own. Once they crossed a patch of light from a drug store window and McCord tried to see what the two looked like—a tall, skinny man on his left, he saw; a stubby man on his right. The shadows held their faces.

"Upsy daisy," the skinny man said presently. They turned off the street, went up three flights of stairs and turned into a long, smelly hallway. A line of light showed beneath a door. The skinny man tapped softly; a chain rattled and the door swung back.

McCord blinked in the light as the stubby man turned to fasten the door again. He saw a cheaply furnished apartment with a worn sofa and four chairs and a table with a bottle and glasses on it. The bleached girl, who had been in Mother Huguet's place, sat there on the sofa; a grossly fat man sat beside her with a thick cigar in the corner of his mouth. It was the fat man that held McCord's attention. He had, he thought, never seen a colder or harder pair of eyes.

McCord squinted at the girl. He said: "Hello, Cissy. You seem to be getting in my hair tonight."

The brandy had died out of him, leaving him cold and watchful. A tough man, Flag McCord. Rangy and square shouldered and with a whimsical quality to his face which contrasted oddly with the ice of his eyes.

"This him?" the fat man asked, turning his head a little to look at the girl.

She nodded. Scared, McCord saw. He wondered why. He fished paper and tobacco from a pocket and sat down in a chair while he made himself a cigarette.

The fat man grunted then: "Sorry to be so abrupt, friend." His voice had a greasy amiability which didn't go with his hard eyes. "It just happened that I wanted to have a little business talk with you, so I had the boys bring you in. No hard feelings."

McCord lifted his eyebrows.

"No? Now that's right nice of you."

The other waved his hand. "I've got a little business proposition to put up to you." His voice changed imperceptibly as he turned and spoke to the girl. "Fix us a drink, Berta."

She got up swiftly and moved across to the table. They jumped around here when the fat man spoke, McCord noted. He cupped his hands about a match and then flipped the burned stick onto the floor while he squinted through the smoke of the cigarette.

"I like to know who I'm doing business with," he said casually. "I remember once down in Honduras—"

"Big Dan Borger's the name, friend." The man leaned forward to prop his palms on his fat knees. "Maybe you've heard of me?"

"I'm not well acquainted around the jails," McCord murmured. "Get on with your proposition. It's past my bedtime."

There was something here that he couldn't lay his finger on, McCord thought sourly. It was tied up with that damned ring. Twice he had seen Borger's eyes fixed on it. One of the men, standing against the door, began to whistle softly through his teeth, and McCord turned a little to let his glance travel over the two of them. He would like to recognize them if he saw them again.

The tall one had red stubble on his hollow cheeks and a scar across his right temple. The stubby man was a tough customer, McCord guessed. Pinch-mouthed and with the marks of a hop-head about him. McCord swung his attention back to Borger.

"The name's Flag McCord," he said in a tiredly patient voice. "You've got the wrong man, brother. *I* got in town off the *Paloma* at seven this morning. For two years I've been helping run revolutions down south, and if you've got any business proposition that would interest me I can't think what it is. Besides, one of your gorillas has got my pet Luger. You can tell him to give it back to me and then I'll go on home."

"Give him a drink," Big Dan Borger said to the girl. He turned irritably to look at the two by the door. "Where in hell's Smoke with that black boy?"

The tall one said soothingly: "He'll be along, boss."

THE girl poured whiskey into a glass and came around the table to where McCord sat. He saw that fright was still mirrored in the depths of her eyes. He made himself another cigarette and wished that the cheap clock on the mantel wouldn't tick so loud. It was apparent that he was not going to leave this room without an argument, he reflected. He'd wait a little longer and see which way the play went.

Big Dan Borger turned back to him, favored him with a heavy-lidded glance while he slouched on the sofa with his hands folded across his belly. It was hot in the room, and there was a faintly acrid smell of stale cooking and cheap cigar smoke.

"Ever hear of Banshee Bayou?" Borger asked suddenly.

McCord shook his head. "Never did."

"Ever hear any talk about a place called the river castle?"

"Nope. I don't get around much."

Big Dan Borger's lips twisted and he leaned forward with his eyes dropping to McCord's left hand again. The gold of the ring sparkled dully in the light. There were a hell of a lot of people interested in that ring tonight, McCord thought with irritation.

"Where'd you get that ring?" the fat man asked in a deliberate voice.

McCord dropped his cigarette and scrubbed it out with the toe of his shoe while he considered whether or not he would reply. Then he shrugged his lean shoulders.

"Heirloom," he said shortly. "When Pappy McCord died he left me this, together with some good advice. Maybe you'd like to hear it?"

Big Dan Borger grunted.

"He told me not to associate with strangers," McCord said sweetly. "I'll take my gun and be trotting along now."

He lounged to his feet and half turned, but his eyes didn't leave the fat man. This wasn't going to be exactly easy, he reflected.

Borger said in a meaty voice: "You'll go when I tell you to. I want to look at

The gun spat viciously.

that ring, friend. Pass it over—now."

The man with the red bristles was shuffling forward. "Shall I cut it off 'im, boss?"

McCord's face was smooth and untroubled, but he was gathering himself, tightening as a coiled spring tightens. He would smash that roll of fat just beneath Borger's left ear, he decided, then take his chance with the other two.

Then someone tapped twice on the chained door and the skinny man dropped his hands and swung about.

"That'll be Smoke," he mumbled over his shoulder to the fat man. The moment had passed and McCord slouched back against the arm of the chair and picked up the whiskey glass in his left hand. The stubby man put the door on the chain and peered out; then he unlatched and dropped the chain.

A BIG man in a canvas coat and heavy boots came through the door, driving a Negro ahead of him at the point of a stubby gun. It was the Negro that held McCord's attention. A coal black man, incredibly old and incredibly tall. No field hand, this. There was a pride in the way he held his shoulders and a dignity marked his face. Blood trickled from a nasty gash above his eye.

The stubby man locked the door again and put his back to it, his face twitching in nervous little grimaces. The man called Smoke jerked the Negro forward until the two of them stood in front of Big Dan Borger. The Negro made no resistance but stood looking down at the other, with no expression in his eyes.

"You're the one they call The Seeing

Eye, ain't you?" Borger asked in a contemptuous voice.

"My name is William Harrison. There are some who call me The Seeing Eye," the Negro said.

His voice was clipped and precise, McCord noted. A cultured voice, carrying no hint of the drawling dialect common to most of his race. This man was a personage.

"You're the one who is supposed to know the road to River Castle?" There was a greasy eagerness in Borger's tone.

"I know where the road begins."

"*Sir*, damn you!"

"Sir," the Negro added after a perceptible pause.

Borger sucked at his lips while he squinted at the other and turned his whiskey glass around and around on the table in front of him. A tight, fantastic atmosphere had crept into the stuffy room, McCord thought. It impressed him against his will.

Big Dan Borger said: "You're going to take us to there. You understand?"

The Negro shook his head slowly.

"No, I cannot do that," he said in his placid voice.

Congested blood suddenly darkened the fat man's face. He swore viciously and slammed his empty glass at the fireplace as he pushed himself up from the sofa to waddle forward on thick legs.

McCord, checking the positions of the others as a chess player checks his opponent's pieces, saw that the two men at the door were closing in. Smoke stood a little to one side and a half a dozen feet away; the girl was at the window with her face pressed against the glass while she peered out into the night.

"Tie him to a chair," Big Dan said viciously. "Stuff a rag into his mouth and peel off his shoes. Well see whether he'll talk or not."

It was time to get going, McCord thought. He was a second too late. Borger had whirled toward him—surprisingly swift movements for a man so grossly fat—and the lamplight shone on the blue of a gun barrel.

"Now you hand over that ring," he said.

IT happened very suddenly. McCord's fingers closed about the bottle on the table and he threw with a looping, overhand throw as he drove himself sideways at Smoke's knees. The bottle caught the fat man in the mouth, toppled him backward onto the sofa in a sprawling fall. His gun spat viciously and McCord heard the faint tinkle of glass as the bullet slammed into a picture on the wall.

Smoke and McCord went down, smashing the table with them as bedlam exploded in the narrow room. A boot thudded into McCord's side, and the pain of it made him dizzy as he got his right hand free and swung hard at the jaw of the man beneath him. He couldn't get leverage enough into the blow.

Big Dan Borger was sitting up, blood streaming from his cut mouth. He bawled thickly: "Put a knife into him, Mac! Put it into him hard!"

Dimly McCord knew that McDougall, the stubby man, was coming across the room with the light dripping wickedly from the long, naked blade in his hand. A gun cracked soddenly and McDougall stopped, a puzzled look spreading across his heavy features. The knife dropped from his fingers and he sat down on the floor, pressing his hands against his stomach.

The Negro, McCord thought.

Smoke's fingers were clawing for McCord's eyes. Then McCord got a knee free, jerked up hard and felt the other go limp beneath him. He rolled away just as gunfire exploded viciously over his head. The lights went out and he heard the Negro's voice call to him with a clear insistence.

"This way! This way!"

Fresh air struck his face as he lunged toward the door; then a strong hand caught his elbow and turned him into the dim hallway. Below, he could hear the sound of feet running heavily up the stairs. A rectangle of light flooded across the hallway as the lamps were switched on in the room again. McCord saw the tall shape of the Negro crouched a little just outside that band of light. Big Dan Borger's gun was in his hand.

Then a woman's voice whispered cau-

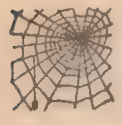
tiously: "There's a back way. I'll show you. Hurry!"

Those running feet were on the floor beneath as McCord touched the Negro's shoulder and motioned for him to come on. The hallway made an ell, and at the end of it the girl was holding open the door of another room.

"In here," she said tensely.

Noise echoed along the corridor and McCord heard Big Dan's thick voice lift above it.

"Block the back way!" he was yelling. His voice had a fuzzy ring to it and McCord grinned thinly in the darkness. Big Dan was going to need some store teeth. "You damned bunglers! You're letting a million dollars slip through your fingers!"



THE sound was cut off as the girl pushed the door shut. The lock clicked sharply. McCord was conscious of the odor of cheap perfume as he moved swiftly across to where the Negro's square shoulders were dimly silhouetted against the single window. He was working with the latch and then the window slid up with a faint squeal. The cool air of the night was good against McCord's face.

"They may be waiting for us down there," the Negro said in his calm, untroubled voice. "It's a chance that we shall have to take, sir."

McCord noticed that the "sir" was given ungrudgingly, and wondered a little at that. The girl was standing close beside him and he reached out to touch her arm. She was trembling violently, he found. Out in the corridor he could hear the muffled scrape of feet and the slam of doors.

"What's below, sister?" he asked.

"A yard with a high fence around it. There's one gate and Borger will have a man at that."

McCord grunted and swung himself out onto the rusty fire escape; balanced there for a moment while he peered into the murk below. He could near nothing down there. Gradually his eyes made out the dim shape of a building, irregular walls beyond. An alley there, he guessed, but it was as black as the inside of a whale.

"I'm going down," he said shortly to the Negro. "You follow with the girl. Wait on the fire escape until you hear me whistle. Understand?"

"Yes, sir." Something cold touched McCord's hand and then his fingers closed over the familiar butt of the Luger. "Maybe you'll want this. I picked it off the floor as I came out."

McCord grinned in the darkness. He was beginning to feel himself again. He said: "The McCords are always lucky." Feet halted outside the door in the corridor, and the knob rattled harshly as he picked his way down the iron steps.

He heard a voice yelling: "They went out through here! Get down in the yard, damn your worthless skins!"

The ladder ended and he hung by his hands and dropped, his knees bent to take the shock. He found that the ground was six inches beneath his toes and swore as he almost lost his balance. Twenty yards away a door was open and light streamed out, the sole relief against that velvety darkness. He moved out a little, the Luger snug against the crotch of his hand.

He heard the faint scrape of feet on the iron of the stairs as he whistled softly; heard the shuffle of their feet as the girl and the Negro dropped. He guided them with a cautious whisper.

"Which way is the gate?"

"To the left," the girl told him. He could hear her teeth chattering. "If Big Dan ever gets me—"

"Shut up, sister. He's not going to get you. Come on."

They stumbled across the yard as voices suddenly bellowed from the window above them. Then a bulky form blotted out the light in the open doorway.

"They're out here!" That was Big Dan Borger's voice, lisping through broken teeth. "Spread out!"

"Run!" McCord said. "This place is getting unhealthy."

His reaching hand touched the fence and he turned left along it; behind him he could hear the girl's quick breathing and the solid thud of the Negro's feet.

Then a man said out of the darkness directly ahead: "Who—"

McCord shot twice at the sound and

heard a man grunt as he fell. He stumbled over a soft shape and then his fingers found the hasp of a gate. He swung it open; pulled the other two through. They were in a narrow alley, he saw; a single light swung lazily above an intersection a half a dozen blocks away.

McCord said harshly: "Head for that light and make tracks. If you get in my way when I start coming I'll run right over you."

He heard the tap of the girl's heels on the cobbles; the heavier slap of the Negro's shoes as he crouched there beside the gate. His first night in town in two years, he thought sourly, and what happened? A bunch of cheap thugs worked him over. He rubbed at his side where the boot had landed and balanced the Luger in his right hand.

"Savanni!" a voice bawled. "Where the hell are yuh?"

McCord slammed a bullet at the voice; then he heard Big Dan Borger shouting over at one side and he drove two slugs in that direction. It was time to go. He jerked the gate closed and went up the alley at a loping run.

The other two were already at the intersection when McCord got there. For a moment the three stood in the shadows close against a building while they listened.

Men were running toward them along the alley; back down there in the dark someone was trying to start an automobile, the starter grinding harshly. Then the long shrill whine of a police siren lifted against the night.

"Come on," McCord said.

They turned the corner, went down a deserted and shabby street, keeping close to the shadows. A narrow alley opened in front of them and McCord turned into that, heading back toward Cachelot Street.

Unfamiliar territory to McCord, but it was no harder to find your way here than it was in the jungle. The girl cried out softly as she stumbled on the rough cobbles.

"I will carry you, madam," the Negro said.

"If Big Dan—"

"Do not worry about Big Dan, madam."

McCORD wanted to laugh. The whole thing was as fantastic as a bad dream. Here he was, running down crooked alleys at two o'clock in the morning with a Negro, who spoke story book English, and a peroxide blonde, who probably was no better than she should be, while half a dozen thugs, led by a fat hoodlum called Dan—to say nothing of the New Orleans police—galloped after them. He barked his shins and swore.

Presently he turned left into another alley which ran from the river parallel to Cachelot Street. There was an occasional street light here, swinging lazily in the hot breeze which had come up. McCord, glancing over his shoulder, saw that the big Negro was carrying the girl as easily as he would have carried a baby. There were dark smudges across her face and she was plenty scared. The Negro's countenance was undisturbed.

Then McCord heard the tinny jangle of a piano a few blocks away and knew that he had steered a course toward the anchorage he had intended. He dropped the Luger back into its holster and eased the pace a little.

Mother Huguet's was a safe haven for ships in distress.

McCord hammered on a little door, set flush with the alley, and presently feet shuffled along the boards inside and the door opened a little. The mulatto who had served him earlier in the evening peered out.

"Whut you want?"

"Let us in. Then send for Mother Huguet. Move, damn you!"

The mulatto spat. "Ain't goin' let no trash in here. You-all go to front door an' come in right."

McCord swore angrily. "You yellow-hided fool! There's probably a cop at the front door right now. Loosen up that chain!"

"You-all go front door."

The door was beginning to close, shutting off that crack of light, when the big Negro behind McCord spoke in his precise voice.

"You will open the door, scum. The great-grandson of Corkle Soor commands it."

He was drunk or crazy or maybe both,

McCord thought sourly. The mulatto's mouth had dropped open, and his eyes had rolled up until they were nothing but whites. He was working at the chain; then the door opened wide and the three of them went through.

He could have sworn that the mulatto's teeth were chattering as he led the way upstairs.

CHAPTER II

THE ROAD TO RIVER CASTLE

MOTHER HUGUET did herself well. There was a big square sitting room with comfortable chairs and a piano and a half a dozen tables scattered aimlessly about. With the door shut the noise from downstairs didn't reach here.

"Well," McCord said cheerfully, "here we are."

He stood in the middle of the floor, feet spraddled a little, while he lifted tobacco and papers from a breast pocket. The girl went across the room to sit in a chair, her hands folded in her lap while she stared straight ahead.

The big Negro stood just inside the door, his arms folded across his chest. McCord squinted at him through the smoke. Somehow, he thought whimsically, this black man reminded him of a big cat they had once caught in Nicaragua—there was the same air of leashed, prideful power about him.

The smoke tasted good against his mouth as McCord lounged over to where a mirror hung above an untidy desk. He grinned sourly, lifted a hand to touch the raw scratch which ran from one ear to the point of his jaw. Well, he had left a better mark than that on Fat Dan Borger. The girl's voice caused him to turn back again.

She was sitting quite still and there was a flat, dead hopelessness in her words.

"Borger never forgets anyone who double-crosses him. He never forgets," she was saying.

"Sister," McCord told her, "I reckon that we owe you a little something for showing us the way out back there. You stop worrying."

She shook her head. "He'll get me within twenty-four hours if I don't get out of this town. He got Spike Dunn—they found him in the river."

"Fat Dan must be a pleasant soul to have around," McCord said under his breath. "Never mind, sister, nothing's going to happen. The cops have probably got your fat friend locked up by now, anyway."

"They don't lock up Dan Borger," she told him in her flat voice. Then her mouth twisted and her voice lifted hysterically. "He'll get me, I tell you! He'll get me!"

McCord stared at her for a moment, then went across to pick up a glass and a decanter from a small table. He poured out a dose of raw brandy and held it out.

"Climb outside of this," he said not ungently. "It'll warm you up."

She gulped at the fiery liquor and her eyes were grateful. She once hadn't been bad looking, McCord thought. Feet shuffled along the passageway outside, then, and Mother Huguet came in. She stood for a moment, blinking.

"Aha," she said in her high voice, "I theenk that you 'ave been having thee fight, no? Or maybe thee leetle cat ees scratch you, Meester McCord?"

McCord grinned and poured himself a drink of the brandy.

"A little cat that weighed two hundred pounds, darlin'," he said. "The three of us have been having a little argument with a feller called Dan Borger. The party got a little rough."

MOTHER HUGUET'S face darkened as she waddled forward.

"Beeg Dan Borger, eh?" she murmured. "That ees bad, eh? An' who are thees wan?"

"Friends of mine, old lady, even if I don't know their names. Sister, here, has put the double X on Fat Dan and thinks that maybe he isn't going to like it. How about looking after her until she can slip out of town?"

Mother Huguet looked at the girl again with a speculative gaze. "You 'ave come een my place before. W'at ees your name, eh?"

"Berta Montclair," the girl said sullenly.

"W'at ees your real name?"

McCord poured himself another glass of brandy. It warmed him and he felt better about the whole thing.

The girl said: "Mary Ruffing."

"W'at place you 'ave come from to thees city?"

"Norfolk, Iowa."

"I'm theenk vairy much better eef you 'ave stay een Norfolk," Mother Huguet said grimly. "Thees Beeg Dan ees —w'at you call tough, eh?"

Mother Huguet popped her lips and pulled a fat forefinger suggestively across her throat.

The girl shivered a little; the wine glass dropped from her fingers to roll across the rug and under the sofa. Then the girl jumped to her feet, her eyes wild.

"Let me out of here!" she screamed suddenly. "*I* know what's going to happen to me—you don't have to tell me! Let me out of here!"

Something softened the backs of Mother Huguet's old eyes. She waddled forward, slid a thick arm about the girl's waist.

"Oh hell, dearie," she said, "maybe thee fat old Mother Huguet she ees 'ave thee too soft heart, eh? Anyway, I feex you up. Thees Beeg Dan ees not fool weeth Mother Huguet, you bet. You come, eh?"

She led the girl away toward the back of the room to where another door opened. The two of them disappeared, the girl crying softly as she walked.

McCORD carried his glass back to the decanter and filled it again. After all, he reflected, this had been a strenuous night. His attention wandered back to the Negro as he licked the flap shut on a fresh cigarette.

"Friend," he said, "you did me a good turn back there a little while ago. I haven't mentioned it but I'm grateful to you. I've always had a sort of prejudice against allowing strangers to stick knives into me."

"You are welcome, Flag McCord," the Negro told him in a grave voice.

McCord lifted the match to the end of his cigarette and then squinted at the man through the blue smoke. He did not recall that his name had been mentioned in the Negro's presence.

"You know my name. How is that?"

The Negro stood there, his head thrust a little forward and his arms still folded. He had been a giant in his younger days, McCord saw — there was still vast power in those broad shoulders. The lamp light touched his white hair and tossed a thick shadow against the wall behind him.

"I know many things, Mr. McCord. I know, for example, that you arrived on the *Paloma* yesterday morning; that the revolution, with which you were associated, failed; that you barely escaped with your life by being smuggled down the coast to where you could catch a boat."

McCord scowled. A heavily ornamented gold clock on the mantel struck three times.

"You've got a good source of information," McCord said sourly. "Maybe you can tell me where I was the last Fourth of July."

The Negro nodded gravely. "You spent the night in the house of a peon called Juan Flores, Mr. McCord. You ate supper and breakfast in that house, and, before you left to go up the Rio Sol, Juan Flores' daughter gave you a flower to wear in your hat. Her name was Rosalie and she was seventeen years old."

McCord's mouth dropped a little open as he stared. He *had* stopped with Juan Flores on that day—he and Tiger Flanders, who had been his friend and faithful body servant through two years of jungle warfare.

"Well, I'll be damned," he said. "For a major-general, without a hundred pesos to his name, I seem to have attracted a considerable amount of attention. All the same I'm not accustomed to being spied upon. Maybe you'll explain that, friend."

"Yes, there were spies," the old man said gently. "They have sent me reports about you for the past two years. Juarez, who keeps the little shop on Alcante Square in Port Dolor; the lame de Gras-

so at Valida—even your servant, Tiger Flanders. They have told me much about you."

Crazy! McCord wondered if it could be the brandy. If it was he might just as well be drunk and under the table as this way, he decided. He poured more of the amber liquor into his glass and lifted it to his mouth. The old Negro was smiling faintly, he saw.

"You do not believe me," the old man said. "That is natural. I am an old man. Yet I have influence, Mr. McCord! there are people who do as I bid them. You may have noticed the man at the door when we entered Madame Huguet's house."

McCord nodded and sipped again at his brandy. The Negro went on in his oddly serene voice.

"Yes," he said, half to himself, "there are those who do my bidding and when, two years ago, I bade them learn for me what sort of a man you were, they obeyed well."

McCord squinted at him. "And just what interest did you have in knowing what sort of a man I was?"

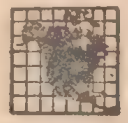
"I carry a trust, Mr. McCord," the Negro told him gravely. "I have carried it for a long while and others of my strain carried it before me. Two years ago I saw you sitting in Madame's Huguet's big room below and I felt that the time was near when I might be relieved of that trust. Still, I was not sure—it was necessary first that I know what manner of man you might be. I have found out and I am well satisfied, Mr. McCord."

"Nice of you," McCord grunted sourly. "It seems that a lot of people have been interested in me—tonight, for example."

"Do you know the significance of that ring that you wear, Mr. McCord?"

"No, I don't," McCord told him in a morose voice. "What's more I don't give a damn! I'm getting sick and tired of hearing about that ring! First sister sees it and lifts a wail; then Fat Borger threatens my person if I don't hand it over to him. Now you! Tomorrow I'll dump the thing in the river and be done with it!"

"No," the old man said gravely. "You will not, because that is John Bradoon's ring, Mr. McCord."



THE liquor was warming McCord. He kicked one of Mother Huguet's overstuffed chairs around and dropped into it. His side ached where one of Big Dan's thugs had planted a boot and he swore at the fresh twinge of pain.

"I never heard of John Bradoon. I don't even want to hear about him. I'm going to get myself forty winks. You'd better do the same. Nobody is going to bother us here and tomorrow's another day."

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"I wished to speak with you alone," the Negro said. "You will wait here, please, at Madame Huguet's. Tomorrow, in the early evening, I will call for you in a closed carriage—until then it is better that you do not go out onto the streets. Will you give me your word that this shall be so? It is important."

"Why in hell should I?" McCord demanded sleepily. He yawned and stretched out his feet. "Sit down and we'll forget all about it, friend."

"Your word?"

"No." McCord was suddenly irritated.

The Negro moved forward a little; there was something imperious in the gesture of his right arm. "A few minutes ago you were good enough to say that I had saved your life. Will you let me presume on that, sir, and ask you again to remain here until I come? You will not regret doing so."

"All right! All right!" McCord told him suddenly. "Now sit down so I can go to sleep."

"I must go now. There are other things yet to be done."

"Go where?"

"You will learn tomorrow."

"You'd better stay off the streets yourself. From what I've seen of this Borger he seems to be a sudden person. You're liable to find yourself floating in the river."

"Do not worry about me."

"I don't," McCord told him sourly. "Good night."

He moved fast for a big man, McCord thought. One moment he had been standing there with the deep shadow behind him; then he was gone. The door closed without sound and McCord slumped deeper into his chair. This was a screwy business.

Mother Huguet came back into the room.

She closed the door carefully behind her and stood for a moment blinking at McCord. He grinned at her and lifted his glass. Mother Huguet was a good old soul, he reflected; she was an anchor to tie to in a crazy world.

"Come in, darlin'. Make yourself right at home."

She waddled across, slapped at his cheek with a fat palm and then lowered herself into a deep chair. Then she jerked her head back toward the room to which she had taken the girl.

"Ees scared, those wan," she said.

"She's got reason to be," McCord told her. "Look here, old lady, she's got to get out of here. Is my word still good for a hundred dollars with you?"

She nodded. "You weesh it now, maybe?"

McCord thrust his hands into the pockets of his trousers and lifted his feet to a stool, while he scowled across the room at the clock on the mantel. It was three-thirty, he saw. He wasn't used to such late hours. His brain felt a little fuzzy from the brandy and he was suddenly conscious of the fact that he was dog tired.

"I'm a sap," he said slowly, as though he was thinking aloud, "but Blondie, there, did me a good turn. Take the hundred and ship her back to Iowa. See?"

"Ees thee romance, no?" Mother Huguet asked, her eyes amused.

McCord swore at her gently and lifted himself to his feet. He swayed a little and swore at that, too. "No ees thee romance. I might as well throw that hundred bucks in the street, but it's a nice gesture anyway. I want some sleep. Is there anybody in the little room at the end of the hall?"

"No wan. Come, I go weeth you."

She grunted as she pushed herself up and padded across toward the door. They went down the dim hallway and Mother Huguet opened another door and snapped on the single light. McCord had stayed here before. There was a small room with a cot at one side and a window which looked down on Cachelot Street.

"Good," McCord said. "You don't need to bother about calling me in the morning."

She puffed out her fat cheeks at him and closed the door. He could hear the boards creak a little as she went down the hallway. He pulled up his shirt, squinted morosely at the ugly looking bruise which lay just under his ribs. Then he snapped out the lights and pulled a sheet over him. He was asleep almost instantly.

IT was nine-thirty the next morning when a battered taxi stopped in front of a quiet house in McKesson Street. Dan Borger climbed out, grunted at the driver and went slowly up the steps to ring a bell in the heavy, old fashioned door. His face was swollen and discolored and there was a gap in his front teeth.

A little peep hole opened in the front of the door and Borger spoke half a dozen curt words. Then the door swung back and he went through. The taxi crawled off down the sunny street.

A Negro in a soiled white jacket said: "Sho looks like you done bumped into something, Mist' Borger. Sho do, suh. Heh! Heh!"

Borger snarled at him over his shoulder as he went through the entrance hall to turn left into a big room, still brilliantly lighted. Heavy drapes covered the windows and the furnishings were expensive. There were gambling tables here, their apparatus hidden by dust covers. There was another room beyond, and Borger went through this to knock viciously at a small door, hidden behind the drapes.

"Who is it?" a voice demanded.

"Borger."

After a minute a key grated in the lock and the door swung back. Borger went through. Walker Gant closed the door again, locked it and went back to sit behind the big, flat-topped desk. Bundles of green currency were scattered across that desk, and Borger stared at them greedily as he sat down.

"Well?" Walker Gant demanded.

He had the flat, dead voice of a master gambler and his face, like his voice, betrayed nothing. Thin and absolutely empty of color; a dead man's face except for the eyes. They were bright and spiteful as Walker Gant looked at the other's swollen face.

"Well, we got exactly no place," Borger said irritably. "We picked up the black boy all right, but he got away before we got a chance to work on him."

"Got away?"

Walker Gant leaned back in his chair and touched the tips of his fingers together while his eyes bored into the other. A tough customer, this Gant. There were stories of things that had happened in his gambling houses. Big Dan Borger's voice whined a little.

"Take it easy, Gant. I've been playing square with you. We were up in the apartment in Cachelot Street waiting for Smoke, when this peroxide blonde of McDougall's comes in. She has seen a feller in Mother Huguet's and this feller is wearing a crocodile ring. You get it—a crocodile ring."

A faint interest began to glow at the back of Walker Gant's eyes, and the fat man hunched himself forward eagerly. It was hot in the close room and sweat trickled down across his fat face. He mopped it away with a soiled handkerchief.

"Go on," Gant said curtly.

"Well, I've never believed any of this rot the black boy has been putting out, but there wasn't any use of passing up a chance, I figured. I sent McDougall and Silvers out to bring him in."

"What sort of a looking man was he?"

Borger ran a finger around his collar and scowled, shaking his head a little. "That's the funny part of it, Gant. He was like the black boy had said—a tall feller with a thin face and a scar at the edge of his hair. He's been fighting revolutions down in South America somewhere, and had just got in on a banana boat. He had the ring, all right. A green crocodile with its tail in its mouth and the two marks on the top of its head. I got a good look at it."

GANT got up slowly and went back to a little cupboard; unlocked it and took out a dark bottle and two glasses. Back at the desk he poured amber liquid into one glass; pushed the bottle and the second glass across the desk.

"Help yourself," he said in his expressionless voice. "Your story is beginning to interest me, in spite of the fact that my better judgment tells me to have you taken quietly out and dumped into the river. "Go on."

Big Dan Borger's lips twisted a little above his broken teeth, but his fingers were shaking as he reached out and

poured liquor into the tiny glass. He lifted it to his lips, spilling a little on his clothes, and then gulped it down.

"I tried to buy it, but he was tough. Even then I might have gotten it without any rough stuff if Smoke hadn't come in just then with this Seeing Eye bird."

He looked at the bottle speculatively and then put his glass back on the edge of the desk. Walker Gant was leaning back in his chair again, sipping at his drink and watching the fat man with contemptuous eyes.

"Go on."

"Well, the black boy got fresh and we started to work on him. Then everything happened at once. Hell, there were four of us there—how was I to know that the two of them would get away clean, or that that blonde of McDougall's would double-cross us? The dirty little—"

"So you let this Harrison get away! And you had your fingers on John Bradoon's ring and you let that get away, too!"

Walker Gant had not moved, but the cold flare of his anger started fresh sweat on Borger's fat jowls. "I'll remember this."

Borger reached forward for the bottle again; he fumbled the glass and had to stoop and pick it up. He was scared. As he straightened his face was pasty.

"It ain't as bad as that," he said hoarsely. "Listen, Gant. This McCord, the feller with the ring, is holed up at Mother Huguet's place, and he's not going to get away, because I've got a man watching. The chances are that we can pick up Harrison again tonight."

"So you can let him get away again, eh?"

"Aw, hell, it ain't—"

"Quiet!" Gant's voice stopped Borger's babble of words as effectively as if he had reached out and smashed him across the mouth. "I told you that I wanted this thing done without any fuss. You bungled it. Harrison's warned and you'll not pick him up again."

Gant placed his glass on the desk and lounged easily to his feet. He pulled down the skirts of his tailored coat and then came around the desk to stand, rocking a little on the balls of his feet, while he stared down at Borger with cold eyes.

The fat man tried to put a bluster into his voice but the attempt was not a success.

"Look here, Gant, we're partners in this thing. I don't have to put up with—"

His voice trailed away as he looked up at the other. It was quiet in the room for the space of a long moment.

"Were partners, Borger," Gant said gently. "Although God alone knows why I should ever have selected a lump of stupidity like you. You're out from now on. The rest of your crowd is out."

Blood suddenly flooded into the fat man's face as he shoved himself up. His voice rose thinly. "Out? If you think that you can get away with a million bucks and leave me out you can think again!"

Walker Gant stepped forward a little, struck twice, the sound of the blows echoing soddenly through the close room.

Borger toppled back into the chair, lay there for a moment. Then uncontrolled rage blacked the fear out of his eyes as his right hand swung back toward his hip.

"I wouldn't," Walker Gant said softly.

He had stepped back a little and Borger saw light run along the steel of the short barreled pistol. Behind it the gambler's eyes were cold. He stepped a little to one side and turned the key in the lock, swung the door open.

"Get up," he said thinly.

Borger got up. The palms of his hands were cold and the fight had gone out of him. He wanted to get away from here. Gant gestured a little with the muzzle of the gun and the other stepped out into the bright lights of the other room. He heard Gant's soft step behind him.

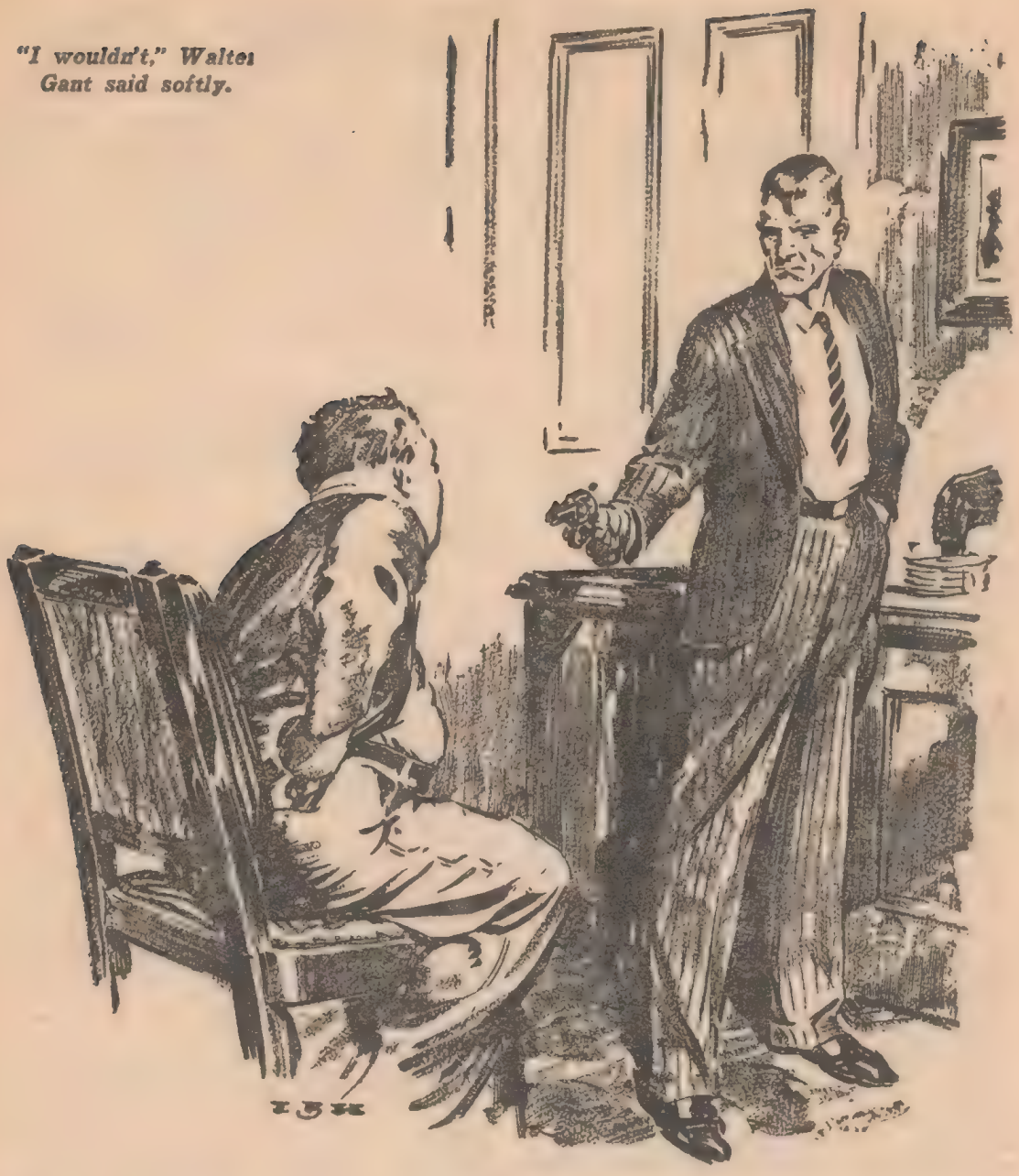
"Anton!" Gant said.

A swarthy-faced man lounged out of a second doorway, a half-smoked cigarette glued to the corner of his mouth. He looked at Big Dan Borger without interest.

"You holler, boss?"

"Kick this into the street," Gant said.

"Sure," Anton said.



"I wouldn't," Walter Gant said softly.

WALKER GANT went back into his office, sat down at his desk. He sat there staring at the wall for a long minute, then reached across for the telephone. After a wait the voice of his party came across the line.

"Mr. Denby," he said.

Another wait and then a thin voice answered him. "Denby speaking. Who is this? What do you want?"

One corner of Gant's mouth lifted sardonically, but his voice was expressionless as he answered. "This is Walker Gant. It is important that you come here at once. Do you understand?"

There was a long silence at the other end of the line and Gant smiled again, a thin and unpleasant smile. He could picture Denby standing there peering at the telephone with his rabbit-like mouth working.

Then the other said: "It's impossible. I—"

"I will expect you within thirty minutes, Mr. Denby. Good-by."

Walker Gant hung up. He poured more brandy into his glass, his fingers steady and unhurried. He sipped at the liquor and then leaned back to contemplate a picture on the wall in front of it. It was a very fine picture—one for which he had paid a great deal of money.

He was still looking when Anton tapped at the door and said that Mr. Denby had come.

Clyde Denby was twenty-nine—a hothouse plant that would die in a mild frost. His hair was colorless, like his eyes, all his assurance dropped away from him as he sat down in the chair toward which Walker Gant waved him. The gambler's face was blank.

"We are carrying quite a large account of yours, Mr. Denby," he said. "I thought that perhaps it would be a good thing if we talked it over."

The other stared sullenly across the desk. He took a handkerchief from his pocket and rubbed it slowly between his palms. Gant was aware of a faint perfume and his distaste for the other deepened.

Denby said: "You got my IOUs. I told you that they'd be taken up as soon as I get my—inheritance."

Gant smiled thinly and leaned forward to rest his arms across the desk top.

"Just where is this inheritance coming from, Denby?" he asked slowly. "Just when do you expect to get it?"

"In a month, maybe sooner."

The flat-chested man put the handkerchief slowly back into his pocket and shifted his feet uneasily. He didn't meet the other's gaze.

A hard note crept into Walker Gant's voice. "You mean when you get your hands on the river castle treasure, don't you, Denby?"

The other jerked as though he had been pricked with a needle. His mouth dropped a little open and the blank astonishment of his gaze told Walker Gant that he was right.

"What—?"

"Yes," Gant murmured. "I've known that for some time now. You talked a little too much one night—talked where certain people of mine could hear. Since then I've been making an inquiry or two and finding out things."

"The gold belongs to my family," Denby said sullenly. "It's been lost for years. It's no crime if I can find it."

"No crime," Walker Gant agreed with him sardonically. "Only I'm going to cut myself in on it. You understand?"

Denby jumped to his feet his pale face reddening suddenly. "No you don't! That's mine! Before I see any chiseling gambler—"

Gant smiled thinly and touched his finger tips together. "I hold a hundred thousand dollars worth of your IOUs in my safe, Denby. Either you pay me that hundred thousand in cash—now—or I take a half share of the river castle treasure when and if you find it."

Denby said sullenly: "You know damned well I couldn't raise a hundred dimes cash now. You'll get paid in full when I get the treasure."

"I have never cared for welshers." There was a hard rasp in Gant's voice as he stood up. "You can consider me as a partner from now on—on equal shares."

"I tell you, you can't do it! Half of that gold belongs to Felice."

"I'll call on you—and your sister—tonight," Walker Gant said with a flat finality. "We'll discuss terms then. Good day, Mr. Denby."

CHAPTER III

THE RIVER CASTLE TREASURE

IT WAS noon when Flag McCord awoke. He sat up, squinting sourly at the streak of sunlight which lay across the floor beside his bed. Then a stiff twinge in his side recalled the events of the night to his mind and he swore as he stood up. He dressed slowly and went on down stairs. Mother Huguet sat at a table and stared placidly at the newspaper propped in front of her. McCord kicked a chair around and sat down.

"Morning, darlin'," he said. "Looks like you've got a boarder on your hands this morning. How about some coffee?"

She called: "Patty!" and presently a Negro girl brought coffee and fried eggs and a pile of toast. McCord didn't wait for an invitation and Mother Huguet went back to her reading, moving her lips silently as she spelled out each word. Finally McCord pushed back the plate and reached for tobacco and papers.

"How's the blonde menace this morning?" he asked indifferently.

Mother Huguet folded the newspaper with painstaking fingers, while she pursed her lips a little and looked on past him toward the window where the sunlight made little patterns on the curtains. Her face looked tired and old in the strong light.

"I 'ave tell her that she ees stay here," she said. "I 'ave tell her that, pretty queek now, she ees go back to thees Iowa. Well, I'm guess that she ees not believe me."

"Gone, eh?"

Mother Huguet nodded. "She ees go out vairy early thees morning so that no one ees see her go."

"Well," McCord said, "she'll probably be back again, but I'll bet that that hundred bucks won't come with her. Hi-ho, McCord, it's not the first time you've bet on the wrong horse."

"She ees not come any more, I'm theenk," the old woman told him soberly. "Thees Harry Jubilo ees come thees morning to say that thee police 'ave found wan girl weeth yellow hair down by the river. No, I'm not theenk that thees Berta ees come some more."

"Dead?"

"Weeth thee throat cut."

McCord sat there, looking at the old woman through the trailing smoke. Then his face hardened as he stood up.

"She was a little tramp but she did me a good turn," he said thinly. "I'll remember this fat Dan Borger when I see him again, old lady."

He went on out, through the bar and into the sunshine of Cachelot Street.

McCORD had not intended to go back to Mother Huguet's: he had dismissed the things that the gaunt Negro had told him the night before as being the wanderings of a warped mind. Yet, oddly enough, at dusk that evening he found himself turning back toward Cachelot Street. Nothing interesting had turned up during the day, he reflected, and there might be something to this after all. Anyway, there wasn't a great deal of demand for the major generals without armies in New Orleans just at the moment.

He swore amiably at nothing in particular and sauntered along in the direction of Mother Huguet's. A clock was just striking eight and the mellow sound of the bell pleased him a little.

Pleasant town, New Orleans.

A black carriage, drawn by two black horses, entered Cachelot from Thramms Street and his interest quickened. The horses were traveling at a walk and he paused at the intersection to watch. The carriage pulled into the curb and stopped.

A voice said: "Get in, Mr. McCord."

It was the Negro who called himself William Harrison; McCord recognized those square shoulders up there in the coachman's seat. For a moment he hesitated. Then he slipped a hand beneath his coat to make sure that the Luger was snug in its holster, shrugged his shoulders and laid hold of the door handle.

There was a faintly musty smell to the interior of the carriage as McCord pulled the door shut and lounged back on the leather cushions. He heard William Harrison speak softly to the horses and they went on down Cachelot Street at a steady walk.

Presently they passed into a part of the city that McCord didn't know—big houses with dim lights in their windows and ancient trees drooping above ancient lawns.

It was an hour later when the carriage turned into a driveway and stopped before such a house. A Negro came silently out of the gloom to stand by the heads of the horses and William Harrison dismounted and held the door for McCord.

"We are here," he said.

"Apparently so," McCord answered him sardonically. "Just where here is I wouldn't know, though."

"This is Colonel Denby's house, sir—Five Oaks."

"I should have brought my uniform." McCord grinned in the darkness His uniform, as a major general in Don Seguro's army, had consisted largely of a pair of khaki shorts and the Luger which now rested beneath his left armpit. "We military men are a little fussy about such things."

"Colonel Denby is dead, sir," the Negro told him gravely. "I am taking you to Miss Denby."

McCord murmured: "Better and better. Lead on, Moses."

They went across a pillared verandah and the Negro swung back a massive door, stood aside.

There was a long hall and McCord got the impression of candlelight and vast expanses of polished floor and emptiness. Then William Harrison was at his elbow again.

"This way, sir."

He turned McCord into a huge room, dim in the shadows. Two candles stood in a silver candlestick on a long, carved mantelpiece with their light flickering weirdly across the full length portrait which hung above them. There was no other furniture in the room.

"If you will wait, sir, I will see if Miss Denby is occupied."

The old man went away, his footsteps echoing in the emptiness of the big room. McCord turned his attention back to the room. A great staircase wound upward at the end of the expanse of polished floor; tall windows opened on either side of the fireplace.

A rich and beautiful room once; now it was dead and tainted faintly with the musty smell which had marked the carriage.

The tall Negro came back, a candle in his hand. McCord followed him up the broad staircase and down a long hallway. There the Negro blew out the candle and tapped at a door.

A voice said: "Come."

McCord went through and blinked a little in the light after the flickering dimness of the stairs and hall. He saw that it was a large room and comfortably furnished, although there was an air of genteel shabbiness about it. A girl stood by a small table, looking at them.

A hell of a pretty girl, McCord noted. Small—she would come about to his shoulder—and slender. Her hair was pushed back from her forehead and he liked the directness of her eyes. The old Negro closed the door and stepped forward.

"This is Mr. McCord, Miss Denby," he said in his precise English. "I have told you about him."

"Sit down," she said. "You must be curious as to what this is all about."

McCord grinned and sat down so that he could face her across the narrow table.

"Curiosity is a failing of mine," he told her.

She didn't smile. The Negro moved back to stand by the door with his arms folded. For a long moment the girl sat there, her chin on her hand, while she stared speculatively at McCord.

He had an idea that she was measuring him and doing a damned workmanlike job of it. Then, suddenly, her face softened a little and she held out a hand to him.

"I'm Felice Denby," she said. "I wouldn't be surprised if I'm not a cousin, far removed, of yours, Flag McCord."

McCord's mouth dropped open a little and he gazed at her blankly. He had made it a business not to be surprised at anything, but this had caught him a half a dozen yards off base.

"Well," he said finally, "the McCords do get about. Go right on, Cousin Felice."

For a moment her eyes darkened angrily at the levity in his voice. Then her eyes cleared and she smiled a little again. An amazingly pretty girl, McCord reassured himself.

"Listen," she said. "I'll tell you. I may be wrong, but I don't think that I am. You can judge for yourself after I've finished."

A fantastic story, McCord thought. A fantastic place. He rolled a cigarette and listened to the even flow of her voice as she unfolded the story of those yellowed papers in the sandal-wood box.

JOHN BRADOON had died at River Castle well over a century ago, but on that morning when his lookouts had brought the word that Arble Thine was coming up the bayou, he had called in Corkle Soor, his body servant, and had given the key to the treasure into his hands.

Gold doubloons, taken from looted Spanish galleons; bars of silver from Mexico; pearls from the islands far to the south—the fruits of ten years of piracy. A tough man, John Bradoon had been; a man filled with the zest of living but who knew when his end was near. He had spoken with Corkle Soor in the tall-ceilinged hall which he had built for himself at River Castle.

"Ye were a king, Corkle Soor."

"Aye."

"An' yet they took ye an' chained ye in the hold of a ship as though ye had been an animal among other animals."

"Aye."

"Yet I took ye an' declared that ye should be a free man again an' a king if ye willed."

"Aye."

"Ye chose to stay with me," John Bradoon had said, "an' glad I have been. We have seen many men die, Corkle Soor. Now comes John Bradoon's turn."

"It is so," the Negro had answered him somberly. "I have seen it in the firelight."

John Bradoon had laughed, his great head thrown back. A tough man with no fear in him.

"I die with no regrets," he said, "because I have filled my life with living. To wait for old age to creep up behind me; to die finally with my eyes half blind an' my hands so a-shake that I could not lift a mug to my lips—no, that is not for John Bradoon! But do ye listen for a moment, Corkle Soor."

"I listen."

"Arble Thine will not touch ye. Neither will Arble Thine's men, for they know an' fear the black magic that ye work. Therefore, I give the secret of the treasure into your keeping. Do ye attend me?"

"I listen."

"There are two sons in Ireland— genteel lads, I have no doubt, for their mother was a cold an' thin blooded woman with scant taste for the things which make life worth the living. Still, my blood runs in them. So, after the sun has set this night, Corkle Soor, ye will take the box an' ye will take the ring."

"Aye."

"Ye will find them, an' ye will give the ring to one an' the box to the other, so that the legacy of John Bradoon may come equally to each—for the gold may not be found without both the box an' the ring. Do ye understand?"

"Aye, it shall be done."

"We will drink a pannikin of rum to it, Corkle Soor, for we be friends, ye an' I!"

Later John Bradoon had gone out alone, his great laughter drifting back, as he went to meet Arble Thine and the cutthroat crew which was working its way up the Bayou of Ghosts—Bayou Banshee.

The years had drifted on and Corkle Soor had drifted with them, waiting for the boat which would take him back to Ireland and the sons of John Bradoon. The chance never came, but in the Bahamas he had taken a wife so that he might have a son to carry on the mission. To this son he had told the story.

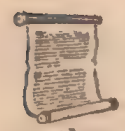
Corkle Soor had been dying, there in the Bahamas, when he started his son out on the quest. The boy was eighteen then; he was nearly thirty when he found the first of John Bradoon's sons —an old man, half blind, living with his only daughter in a bare castle a-top an Irish hill. Corkle Soor, the Second, had left the sandalwood box there and had gone on.

It was two years later that the British frigate, into which a press gang had dumped him, was taken by a rangy American sloop off the Azores and he found that his searching was at an end. The master of the sloop was John Bradoon's grandson, and Corkle Soor gave the ring over into his keeping, for John Bradoon's second son had died at Brandywine. After the war Walter Bradoon settled in New Orleans and Corkle Soor went with him.

Twice the two of them journeyed

back to Ireland, looking for the box, but there had been famine years there and all trace of the other branch of John Bradoon's family was gone. The old man had died, they said, and the girl had gone away. No one knew where. Presently Walter Bradoon had died, passing the tale and the sandalwood box on to his daughter, for he had no sons. Likewise Corkle Soor had died, leaving only a daughter, but he passed on to her the secrets which his father had passed on to him.

So had John Bradoon's line been lost.



FLAG McCORD squinted at the little heap of brown cigarette ends in the ash tray close to his hand, began to fold yet another with methodical fingers. The girl stopped for a minute. Then she picked up the small box, which had rested beneath the lamp, and handed it across to him. McCord took it; turned it curiously between his hands.

It was old, the wood stained darkly by much handling. Curiously carved brass hinges held the lid and the hasp was cut into the rude form of a crocodile—the same sort of a crocodile as the one which made up his ring.

"Open it," Felice Denby told him in a low voice.

He nodded and lifted the lid. Papers there, yellowed and fragile with age and covered with faint writing. A little book bound in stiff leather lay at the bottom. He lifted it, turned the leaves gently,

> June 13:—Left Porto Bello this morning. A fair wind and a following sea. There was talk in the taverns of a British ship of the line at San Julio two fortnights ago. . . .
>
> June 14:—Raised a sail at daybreak. She proved to be the *Marguerita*—a rich ship. I burned her, first setting her crew a-drift in her boats. They will make Porto Bello all right. We took six chests of gold besides a small chest of jewels and much silk, etc.
>
> June 16:—Arble Thine is making trouble because I allowed the crew of the *Marguerita* to take to the boats. . . .

John Bradoon's log. McCord laid it aside and picked up the papers. One of them was a detailed map drawn upon fine parchment. He studied it but it meant little. Beneath it was a half a dozen lines of fine writing—spidery script which was hard to read. He laid the map back on the table and looked up.

The girl was watching him, and he was suddenly aware that the old Negro no longer stood beside the door. He had been so absorbed in the papers that he had not heard him leave.

"Well?" McCord asked the girl.

"Do you believe what I have told you, believe what you see there in the sandalwood box?"

"Do you?"

"Yes," she told him in a low voice. "I've been brought up to believe it, you see. Since I've been old enough to understand I have heard nothing else. Look!" She reached across to place a slim forefinger on the map, trace out a line. "This is Bayou of the Ghosts and it leads to River Castle. That much I know."

McCORD slowly stamped his cigarette out. He was forced to acknowledge, against his will, that there was something convincing about the story which the girl had told him. Maybe it was the way she had told it. Still, he had played hunches before and had won; this looked like a good one to play. Felice Denby looked up at him again, her finger still on the parchment map.

"The road begins here," she told him slowly. "The river castle is at the end of it."

"You seem sure."

She was quiet for a long moment. Then she said: "My father made three attempts to find the treasure. All of New Orleans knows it. All New Orleans doesn't know what happened on that last trip that he made. Even Clyde doesn't know that."

"Clyde?"

"My half brother." She paused for a moment; then went on. "Dad had made two trips up the bayou already, although he had been told that he would fail. The first time he came down with fever and had to turn back; the second time the rains came on and he lost his way—

came out finally, half dead, in the upper reaches of Barataria Bay. Then, three years ago, he made a third attempt. Harrison had gone with him on the first two expeditions, but dad made him stay behind this time. He was angry, I think, because Harrison had told him that this try would be even more disastrous than the other two had been."

McCord murmured: "Last night I heard this Negro, Harrison, call himself Corkle Soor's great grandson. That is true, then?"

The girl nodded, pushing a slim hand up through her hair as she leaned back a little. It was hot in the room. This whole thing was fantastic, McCord thought; presently he would wake up and find himself sitting at one of Mother Huguet's iron-topped tables. He grinned a little to himself.

"I believe that to be true," Felice Denby was saying. "He's always been with us. Well, dad went alone this time. He was gone for weeks. Then one night he came back."

She stopped for a moment and McCord caught a glimpse of the swift pain at the back of her eyes. In spite of himself he found that he was believing her.

She went on finally. "I was in the room below. It was a rainy, wild night. I heard something at one of the French windows and I went and opened it. He was crouched there, like a dog upon his hands and knees.

"It was minutes before I knew him. His hair had turned completely white and his face and eyes held a terrible, frightened vacancy. His mind had gone completely, you see."

Felice Denby reached out slowly and picked the papers up in her fingers.

"He died ten days later," she told McCord in a flat voice. "Before he went he had a few moments of sanity again —I was alone with him. He told me that he had found the castle. He had come upon it suddenly one evening just as it was getting dark. His Negroes had deserted him but he went on and camped by the walls.

"Something happened to him there. He couldn't tell me what. It was something—unpleasant."

McCORD got up slowly and lounged across to the open window. A moon was beginning to come up and the ancient trees cast velvety shadows across the lawn. He had no eye for the beauty of the night, however. His mind was busy with the things that the girl had been telling him, but the pattern was not yet complete, he decided. He turned back abruptly.

"I'm Flag McCord," he said evenly. "I've never heard of you before and you've never heard of me. Why are you telling me all this?"

"Because I believe that you are sprung from the other branch of John Bradoon's family," she told him in a soft voice. "Do you understand now?"

He came back to drop into the chair facing her while he rolled a fresh cigarette.

"Cousin Felice," he said dryly, "you seem to have considerable information about me that I have never heard of. Just why should *I* be one of the Bradoon clan?"

"I have Harrison's word for it."

McCord flicked a thumbnail across a match head and lifted his cupped hands to his mouth, while he watched her across the flame. He liked the way the light trickled across the smooth sheen of her hair. Then he dropped the burned stick into the ash tray and leaned forward with his arms on the table.

"Look here," he said gently, "don't you think that maybe you're taking Harrison's word for an awful lot? You're a nice kid, Cousin Felice, but if you go around making friends with every bum who drops off a banana boat you'll come to a lot of grief one of these days."

She shook her head and her eyes met his squarely. "I don't think that I'm mistaken, Flag McCord," she told him. "You see, I have known Harrison all my life. He has a gift of seeing things which are hidden to other people. He has searched for a long while—too long to be mistaken. Then there is the ring."

McCord sat still. He was remembering the look that had been on the mulatto's face as he had held the door back so that they could enter Mother Hu-

guet's this morning. Then he lifted his hand so that the light fell on the ring and stared curiously.

The girl leaned forward and there was a faint excitement in her voice now. "Where did you get it, Flag McCord?"

"I don't know for sure," he told her soberly. "One of the sisters at the orphanage gave it to me when I was nine. She said that it belonged to me. I ran away that week and never had a chance to ask her more about it."

The door opened softly behind McCord. The old Negro had come back again. Harrison came forward into the light with a steady step.

"It is the ring," he said in a slow and deliberate voice. McCord saw that his eyes were closed. "It is the ring. Give it to me."

FOR a moment McCord hesitated. Then Felice Denby made a little gesture with her hand and he shrugged and twisted the ring free to drop it into the Negro's outstretched palm.

"The map leads to the castle, but the ring leads to the gold," the old man was chanting in a deep, sonorous voice. "Hi . . . ahee . . . ho! Yet no man can follow where the chart and the ring lead unless the blood of John Bradoon flows in the veins of his clan. It is because of that that the gold has lain hidden these years. Corkle Soor said that it should be so, for he was John Bradoon's man."

The Negro had advanced slowly until he stood between the two of them, and McCord watched with fascinated eyes. The old man was holding the ring out to the light so that they could see clearly. Slowly, then, he grasped it between the thumb and forefinger of each hand; pulled and the metal gave way to straighten out and lie flat on the Negro's palm. A crocodile, two inches long—the glass eyes winked up in the light.

"Take it, Flag McCord."

McCord stretched out his hand and picked the thing up, stared at it curiously as though he hadn't worn it for twenty years. Felice Denby was leaning forward, her lips parted a little while she watched.

"Press your thumbnail under the left foreleg and turn the head."

McCord was aware of swift excitement as he did as Harrison had ordered. The head turned and he unscrewed it and laid it carefully on the table. A tiny cylinder of tightly rolled parchment had been fitted into the hollow of the reptile's body. He pulled it out and the girl came to stand at his shoulder as he smoothed the sheet on the table beneath the light.

Like that of the map, the writing was faded and old but it was still decipherable. The roughly drawn plan of a building. Arrow marks pointed to a route, and fine writing set down measurements and directions. The arrows ended at a spot which was marked by a tiny cross. The aged Negro pointed a long finger.

"The gold lies there," he said.

McCord stared at the faded writing for a long minute. The girl was standing close beside him now; he was vaguely aware of the faint perfume which she wore.

"It's true," she said under her breath. "It must be true!"

McCord looked up then, grinned suddenly as he made up his mind. He said: "You win, Cousin Felice. When do we start?"

It was after midnight when he took his leave.

The thing was decided. Felice had a few hundred dollars—money which her mother had left her and which Clyde Denby had not been able to touch—and McCord knew that he could raise enough more to fit out for the trip. They would need a good boat, enough of an outfit to enable them to live for some weeks, perhaps, in the swamp. Felice would go with him.

He had protested that at first. He knew jungles from sad experience, and those swamps to the west of Barataria Bay were no place for a woman. He and Harrison would travel faster and better alone. It had been the old Negro, though, who had finally convinced him otherwise.

"It is better that you go together," William Harrison had said slowly. "John Bradoon would have wished it so."

Things had come to a hell of a pass when he allowed himself to be influenced by the stories of a half crazy Negro, McCord thought sourly. Still, the thing was done. The two of them went down the broad staircase with the candlelight flickering ahead of them across the empty floor.

The Negro opened the big front door and McCord saw that the black carriage was waiting again. "I'll drive you, Mr. McCord."

"I'd rather walk," McCord told him. "I need the air."

He went down the steps and on across the lawn, mottled with the shadows of the magnolia trees. The moon was high now and a cool breeze had sprung up. At a corner mail box he stopped for a moment, dropped in a letter.

FELICE DENBY gathered up the papers and placed them slowly back into the sandalwood chest. She stood for a moment, looking down on the faded map, the sketch of River Castle; then closed the lid and fastened the old fashioned hasp. She was just lifting the box when a faint noise at the door attracted her attention.

The knob was turning slowly and someone was pressing against that door from the other side. The door was locked, she knew, but icy fingers suddenly touched her heart. Many things could happen here in this big, gloomy house. She wished, bitterly, that McCord had stayed.

Walking on tiptoe she went across the room and slipped the sandalwood chest far back into a deep wardrobe; came back, then, to stand beside the lamp again. Something rustled behind her and she whirled, laughed nervously as she saw that it was only the wind billowing the curtain. She closed the window and bolted it and then went back to the chair where she had been when McCord first came in.

She lighted a cigarette to steady her nerves, but she found that she couldn't keep her eyes from that door knob. Perhaps it had been imagination. The knob no longer moved—she was just jumpy. Harrison would be back soon now.

Knuckles rapped on the wood of the door, then, and she jumped so that she dropped the cigarette. It rolled under a chair and, after she had picked it up, her fingers were shaking so that she could hardly stamp it out in the ash tray.

"Who is it?" she asked.

Clyde Denby's voice reached her ears, muffled a little by the thick planks of the door. "Me. Let me in, Felice. I've got to see you at once! It's important!"

Relief flooded over the girl as she got up out of the chair swiftly. She was a little angry that she had allowed her nerves to run away with her like that—and for Clyde. She slid back the bolt and reached to place a hand on the knob.

The door swung wide suddenly and Felice stepped back, that icy hand reaching out to lay hold of her again. There was something wrong here, she could see it in her half brother's pasty face.

Behind him, in the dimness of the hallway, she could see two others, one of them a grossly fat man.

"What is it?"

Clyde Denby walked forward unsteadily and she backed away in front of him. He had been drinking heavily, she saw. The other two men followed and the fat one closed the door behind him and slid the bolt. Then he waddled forward, his hands in his pockets, to stand and appraise her with piggish eyes.

For a moment Denby stood there, swaying a little on his feet while he glared at her. Then he waved a hand toward the fat man.

"Tie her up, Borger," he said. "The papers are here some place."

FELICE stood frozen as the fat man moved toward her; then the touch of his moist fingers on her wrist awakened her into frantic action. She tried to whirl away, but the other man was coming up on the other side of the table, grinning. His hands pawed at her.

She fought silently, striking at the fat man's bruised mouth, but it was just a question of seconds. Pain flowed through her elbow as Borger twisted her arm. In

a moment more he had tied her wrists and pushed her down into the chair. The thin man gagged her, working with swift and expert fingers.

"Come on," Denby said impatiently. "That box is in here somewhere."

It was Fat Dan Borger who found it. He had ripped the clothes out of the wardrobe, throwing them across the floor. Then he grunted and stooped, came back to the table with the sandalwood chest in his hands.

He lifted the lid and his eyes narrowed as he picked up the map and the sketch and held them to the light. He put them back into the chest, then, and snapped the lid while he turned back to Clyde Denby. He stood watching the man for a moment, his eyes narrow. Denby shuffled his feet; made a half hearted gesture with one of his hands.

"Listen, Borger, those are my papers—"

"Were your papers, Denby," Big Dan Borger told him coldly. "Now it just happens that I've got use for you and I'm going to let you play along with me. If you keep yapping about what's yours I might forget that you're useful. You understand?"

Denby's face twisted up into a pallid mask as he stood there. Then his eyes dropped under Big Dan's contemptuous stare and he wet his lips with his tongue.

Dan Borger turned toward the door, the box under his arm. He jerked his head to the thin man who still stood beside the chair where the girl sat.

"Bring her along, Slim," he said. "She's been wanting a trip to River Castle, and I wouldn't want to disappoint a lady."

Slim grinned and thrust a hand under the girl's arm.

They were halfway down the big staircase when Borger stopped, swearing a little under his breath as he slipped his right hand back to his hip. The Negro was coming across the polished floor with his candle held high above his head.

"Who is there?" the old man asked in his clear voice.

He stood at the foot of the steps now, his head tipped back so that the candlelight gleamed across the polished ebony of his face. The darkness was a shell around him. He understood, then, and his voice was a harsh blade cutting through the hot gloom.

"Miss Denby! I'll—"

Big Dan Borger shot twice, the sound bellowing through the empty house in a long wave of sound. Black despair crept slowly up across Harrison's face. Then the candle dropped; rolled across the floor to gutter out in dying spurts as the old man sank slowly to his knees.

"Come on, damn you!" Borger snarled. "We haven't got all night! Get hold of that dame's hair and drag her along if she gives any trouble, Slim!"

They went on across the empty floor toward the back of the big house. Above the sound of their footfalls Felice could hear the old negro moaning softly. Then, suddenly, his voice lifted with harsh clarity.

"Arble Thine!" he was saying. "John Bradoon will hang you at the end of a long rope, Arble Thine! Ha . . . aheho . . . eeho."

The girl shivered.

CHAPTER IV

THE QUEST BEGINS.

WALKER GANT sat in his office with a glass of brandy in his hand while a doctor took stitches in his scalp. From beyond the heavy door Gant could hear the familiar sounds of the play which went on out in the gambling rooms, but he was not thinking of that. His mind, instead, was somberly busy with the thing that had happened out there at Five Oaks tonight.

A silver clock, on the desk in front of him, said thirty-seven minutes after three. The doctor, a small and brisk man, worked cheerfully in spite of the fact that he had been routed out of bed at an unearthly hour.

"Iodine," he said. "This will hurt."

The sting of it cleared Gant's mind as he lifted his brandy and sipped slowly. The doctor tore adhesive tape with a swift, ripping sound and began to apply a dressing.

"Nasty cut," he observed. "You must have enemies around here, Mr. Gant."

"I bumped into a door," Walker Gant

told him coldly. "Are you through?"

"All through. You'll have a headache for a little while, but tomorrow you'll be as fit as a fiddle. I'd advise you to get to bed, though, and get some sleep. There's usually a mild concussion in such cases. It might—"

Gant cut him off. "What do I owe you?"

"That'll be five dollars, Mr. Gant. You see, getting up out of bed and all—"

Gant flicked a twenty dollar bill out across the desk.

"Good night," he said curtly. The doctor looked at him for a minute, his mouth a little open. Then he picked up the bill, lifted his bag and went out the door.

Gant sat there quietly for a half an hour after he had gone. Twice he replenished his glass from the squat decanter. It was a litttle after four in the morning when he sat forward suddenly and pushed a button beneath the edge of the big desk. After a little, feet shuffled outside and a man rapped at the door.

"Sam, suh."

"Bring the car around in front," Gant ordered. "Then wait for me there."

There was a swift purpose about Gant's movements now as he got up out of the chair. He opened the drawer of the desk and slipped a snub-nosed automatic into the side pocket of his coat; then went across the room to pick up a heavy cane.

People moved slowly out in the big salon. The crowd was thinning out, but the tables were still getting a good play, he noted. A man called out to him as he turned into the entrance hall, but he didn't reply. He went on down the steps and climbed into the car and Sam closed the door behind him.

"Do you know where Mother Huguet's café is in Cachelot Street?"

"Yes suh," Sam told him.

"Take me there."

The big car moved slowly away from the curb and turned out into the deserted street.

McCORD had stopped in Mother Huguet's for a nightcap before going to bed; and he sat now, turning his brandy glass around between his fingers, while he thought over the strange things which he had seen and heard tonight. Felice Denby had not been lying to him, he knew. There might be no Bayou Banshee and the search for River Castle might be a wild goose chase, but the girl believed it. He would string along with her.

He swore half humorously to himself and tipped up his glass.

Going soft in his old age, he guessed wryly.

He was about to leave the table when a man came through the front door from Cachelot Street; stood there, just inside, for a moment while he looked around. Mother Huguet's was nearly empty now. A tall man, McCord saw, with a controlled and expressionless face. The stranger's gaze settled on McCord, then, and he came across toward the latter's table with an unhurried stride.

"Mr. McCord?" he asked in a flat voice.

"The same," McCord told him. He had a vague impression that he had known this man before somewhere, but he couldn't put his finger on the place or the circumstances of the meeting.

"I won't waste your time," the other said. "I'm Walker Gant, a gambler. I'd like to talk with you where we won't be overheard. I think that you'll be interested in what I've got to say."

For a moment McCord lounged there in his chair, staring up at the other with his eyes hardening a little.

Then McCord murmured: "Sit down. This is as good a place to talk as any, I reckon."

Gant nodded and pulled a chair around. He laid his hat on the table and McCord noted the white dressing across the side of the other's head. The mulatto came in answer to Gant's signal.

"Bring a bottle of brandy."

"Talk fast, brother," McCord said. "I've had a long day and I figure on sleeping right shortly now."

Gant nodded. Then the mulatto came back with the brandy, padded away again with a folded bill between his fingers.

Gant poured the amber liquor into the two glasses.

"Tonight you and Felice Denby made

certain plans concerning a treasure which is supposed to be hidden at a place called River Castle," he said without preamble.

McCord's eyes narrowed but he lifted his brandy glass with a steady hand.

"Your good health," he said. "And what if we did, brother?"

"Nothing." Walker Gant's voice was hard and even. "I intend to lay my cards upon the table. I hold Clyde Denby's IOUs for a hundred thousand dollars. Naturally I made inquiries to see whether or not the yellow pup was good for that amount, and I found out things that interested me. Years ago I heard first of the River Castle treasure. I discounted the tale, as I have discounted a hundred like it—until certain things, which I learned not long ago, caused me to believe that this particular treasure existed and that there was a good chance that Clyde Denby could find it. You follow me?"

"I follow you," McCord said flatly. "Get on with it."

"You know much of this already. It's enough to say that I was the one, indirectly, who caused Dan Borger to pick you up the other night."

McCord leaned forward suddenly and his eyes had become polished bits of metal. Walker Gant sat there, his fingers turning his brandy glass slowly while he met the other's gaze with no trace of expression on his face.

"Mister," McCord said softly, "I think that you've made a lot of mistakes. A hell of a lot."

Walker Gant lifted his glass again and sipped thoughtfully at the liquor. Then he placed it back on the table again.

"Perhaps. I'll go on, if you don't mind. I kicked Borger out after he allowed you to slip through his fingers. I should not have done that—I should have had him taken out into the swamp and left there. However, I didn't. I had told this Clyde Denby that he could count on me as a partner."

Walker Gant smiled thinly and lifted his glass again. "As a matter of fact I insisted on being a partner. I told him further that I would call upon his sister at nine o'clock last evening and explain the terms of the partnership."

THE anger, which had been rising in McCord's brain, suddenly disappeared and he was amused instead. This Walker Gant was a cool one, he thought. He had seen others like him—men gambling on lost causes for the excitement of the thing, unscrupulous men, but men who could be counted on when the going became rough.

"And you found me there instead, Gant?"

"No," Gant said evenly. "I found my friend Clyde there instead. The little rat had more courage than I gave him credit for having. Borger and another man was with him and they caught me neatly." He reached up to touch the dressing on the side of his head, smiled again tightly. "You said, a moment ago, that I had made many mistakes, McCord. I am forced to admit that you were right."

McCord had a sudden cold feeling at the pit of his stomach.

"Come to the point, Gant," he ordered harshly.

"The point is that Borger tied the girl up, took the sandalwood box and is probably on his way to Barataria Bay by now."

"And Felice?"

"He took her along with him but, unless I'm badly mistaken in Big Dan Borger, she won't come back out of Banshee Bayou with him. Neither will that precious brother of hers, for that matter."

"You're lying!" McCord said between his teeth as he half lifted himself out of his chair. "Damn you, Gant, you're playing some game of your own! What is it?"

Walker Gant did not move and his gaze was steady.

"Sit down," he said. "I'm not lying. I went out there at nine o'clock last night and ran into them unexpectedly. One of Borger's men clubbed me with a blackjack and they dragged me into a woodshed and locked me up. When I came to I heard voices and watched them leave—Borger, a man I didn't know, Denby and the girl. I broke down the woodshed door and went back into the house and found Harrison dying at the

foot of the stairs. Borger had put a bullet through him."

McCord swore bitterly. He knew, somehow, that Walker Gant was telling him the truth.

"I'm getting quite a little account to settle with Fat Dan Borger," he said and his face was bright and hard. "I'm obliged to you for the information, friend, and I reckon I'll be getting along now. It looks as though I've got things to attend to before I do any sleeping tonight."

"And just what do you expect to do?"

McCord laughed mirthlessly as he pushed back his chair. "Find Borger, you fool! What in hell else would I be going to do?"

Walker Gant gestured swiftly with a lean hand. "Take it easy. Even if Dan Borger was still in New Orleans you wouldn't be able to run him down without help. I told you once, though, that the chances are good that he's on his way to Barataria by now."

"How do you know?"

"It pays a man in my profession to find out little things like that, McCord," Gant told him drily.

He leaned forward and carefully placed his glass on the table while his eyes studied McCord with a hard scrutiny. "I've got a little proposition to make to you."

"You're full of words, all right," McCord said in a sour voice. "Talk on."

"You, being smart, made a copy of whatever papers there were in the sandalwood chest, and that copy is safe some place. You know how to get to River Castle, but you're broke and it takes money to make a trip like that. On the other hand, I've got money but I've got no map. Figure it out."

"Friend Gant," McCord said, "you've got about as much crust as any man I ever saw. First you set this thug Borger on me; now you come around and propose that the two of us hunt him down together."

"Take it or leave it," Walker Gant said curtly.

"By God," McCord told him softly, "I'm going to take it, Gant. Something tells me that it's going to be right interesting."

RAIN had set in at midday, and now it drizzled steadily down to make little pocks on the brown and almost motionless water of the bayou.

The steamy gloom was beginning to thicken as night closed down; off to the left the grass rustled harshly as a gator slid down into the water.

McCord, sitting in the bow of the heavy, broad-beamed boat, hunched his shoulders a little against the rain while he tamped damp tobacco into his pipe. The taste of the smoke was good against his mouth. He looked back toward where Gant sat at the wheel, a four days' beard on his cheeks and an old slicker covering his shoulders.

"We'd better be tying up pretty quick," McCord said. "If we get off on one of these side branches in the dark we'll spend the rest of our lives wandering around this damned swamp."

Walker Gant nodded but didn't speak as he pushed the wheel down a little. A long frond of dripping moss brushed against McCord's face as the boat swung close to the left hand bank to miss a fallen tree.

Walker Gant had proved to be a good man to bring into the jungle, McCord reflected. He didn't talk much and he went about his job with an unhurried efficiency that pleased the younger man. They had made good time. At daybreak, this morning, they had left the bay and had started up the bayou.

It was a half an hour later when Gant turned the bow of the boat in toward the right bank again. A few feet of ground lifted above the swamp here, McCord saw through the rain—enough so that they could build a small fire and get hot coffee.

He moved forward cautiously and tossed a rope about an overhanging tree trunk as the boat nosed into the soft mud. A water moccasin wriggled into the water beneath him and he swore a little.

They squatted on their heels while they ate. It was hot, here in the swamp, hot with a smelly heat which pressed down on a man's shoulders like a steamy blanket. Insects were a cloud about McCord's head and he brushed at them ir-

ritably as he put down his cup and started to pack his pipe. Funny how you could be fooled in a man, he thought as he looked at Gant across the fire. He looked little like the immaculately dressed gambler who had come into Mother Huguet's five mornings ago. Now the bandage around his head was soiled and frayed; a raking branch had slit the sleeve of his shirt and his face was swollen and puffy from the bites of uncounted thousands of insects. Still, his eyes were placid and untroubled as he met McCord's gaze. McCord wondered, again, why the other's face should be so vaguely familiar to him.

Gant said slowly: "Let's take a look at that map again, McCord."

He came around the fire to squat down beside the younger man while McCord spread the damp map on his knee and held his slicker so as to keep the rain away. Two hours before the bayou had made a long turn to the north and he pointed with his finger.

"We ought to be right about in here, I figure," he said. "With luck maybe we'll make River Castle sometime tomorrow. What do you think?"

Walker Gant nodded, rubbing a hand thoughtfully across the stubble on his chin.

"Maybe," he answered. "It's been easy going so far. It's not likely to be so easy tomorrow. These bayous can split up into a thousand branches, each one just like every other one. Ever been lost in one of these swamps, McCord?"

"My old man always told me to keep away from women and swamps," McCord said cheerfully. "Up until lately I've always minded him."

Gant straightened and went on back to his own side of the fire; sat there, listening, for a little while. A bull frog boomed hoarsely a dozen feet away and was answered by a sullen chorus from deeper in the swamp. McCord had the impression of life moving out there in the darkness beyond the scarlet circle of the light. Greedy, malevolent life which was born in the dark and grew, festeringly, in half light until it was gobbled up by other life. He jerked his shoulders impatiently. Hell, he was getting jumpy over a little jungle, he thought.

"Yes, the swamp is bad," Walker Gant said understandingly. "A man wouldn't have much chance of making his way out alone. For example, if I took the boat and pushed off and left you here on this little hummock, McCord—how long do you think that you would last?"

"I reckon I'll die sort of hard when I go," McCord said. "That won't be here in this damned swamp though, friend Gant."

Gant was looking at him—with a curious, intent expression, McCord saw. "Why not?"

McCORD grinned thinly. Then, with a single smooth motion, the Luger lay in his hand with the red firelight glancing along the barrel. He pointed it idly at a cypress knee thrusting out of the water a dozen feet to Gant's left; balanced it in his hand.

"I've been taking care of myself for quite a while now, Gant," he told the other quietly. "I sleep light, too."

Gant suddenly laughed, throwing back his head. There was something likeable about his face then, McCord thought. Then, suddenly, he knew who it was that Walker Gant reminded him of—young Joey Willington, when he had been riding with Louis Ferenda down in the Gran Chaco.

"We'll get along," Walker Gant said.

"You ever know anybody who called themselves Willington?" McCord asked. He saw that Gant's eyes had suddenly become watchful.

"Why?"

"I once knew a kid down south who called himself that—Joey Willington. He looked something like you. Tell me I'm crazy, if you want to. It's none of my business."

"My brother," Gant said soberly. "I've been told that he's dead."

"I was with him," McCord said softly. "There were about twenty of us got caught one night in a little place called Puerto Corbado. Joey was one of the ones who didn't come out."

Gant sat there, smoking and staring out into the rain, for a long minute. His face had dropped back into the flat and expressionless mask of the gambler again.

He said finally: "I sent him to school, tried to keep him from making the same mistakes that I made. It was no use. He had the same blood."

McCord nodded, understanding. Somehow, he knew that he liked and trusted Walker Gant, sitting across the fire there in the rain. Presently the two of them went on across to wrap sodden blankets about themselves and stretch out in the boat. The fire died away, its embers darkening slowly.

It was two-thirty in the morning when McCord roused himself out of a restless sleep. He had dreamed that he had heard a rifle shot. Then he saw Walker Gant's shadowy form and he knew that it had been no dream. Another shot, muffled and indistinct, drifted across the night. Then two more.

"Up river," Gant said under his breath.

McCord kicked his blanket away and stood up. "Let's go," he said harshly. "That'll be Borger, Gant!"

The rain had stopped and, here and there, patches of moonlight filtered through the heavy jungle to float on the oily water. Gant was moving aft, the boat rocking a little under his weight.

"No use," he said slowly. "The chances are a thousand to one that we'd get off the main channel. We've got to wait for daylight."

McCord, thinking of the girl up there in that stinking swamp, swore viciously under his breath. Gant was right. There was nothing to do but wait.

Ever been lost in one of these swamps, McCord?"

BIG DAN BORGER'S slim power boat had broken out of the jungle which overhung the bayou, and nosed into a shallow lake at about the same time that afternoon that McCord had begun to look for a place to tie up for the night. A green dusk hung over the water and it was cooler out here than it had been in the narrow tunnel through which the bayou crawled. The muffled drone of the boat's engine echoed sullenly against the leafy walls which hemmed the lake in as Big Dan Borger swung the boat in a wide circle.

Felice Denby sat in the stern, her hands in her lap and the rain trickling slowly down across her face as she stared ahead. There was a hunted look in the droop of her shoulders, the drawn lines of her mouth. These last days had been a hideous dream from which she had been unable to escape, although Borger, or his men, had not laid hands on her since that night at Five Oaks.

She looked forward to where her half brother crouched beside the man she knew as Slim Hardesty. Denby's face was haggard and miserable. Dan Borger and Dan Borger's men had reduced him to a sniveling rag. The sight of him turned Felice a little sick.

"This is the place, by God!" Borger grunted suddenly. "There's been a landing over there once! Take a look, Slim!"

Felice Denby turned her head a little and felt a faint stirring of excitement in spite of herself. The darkness was dropping swiftly, but she could make out the gray ruins of ancient pilings which jutted out of the mud of the lake shore. Borger swung the wheel over.

The boat nosed into the soft mud of the bank and Borger dropped over the side. He sank to his knees in the slime, but plowed on to haul himself up onto firm ground. Smoke and the scarred Duke Erhgott followed him. For a moment they stood there, talking in low voices. Then Borger waved a fat hand.

"Bring 'em ashore," he said to Slim Hardesty.

Hardesty hooked tough fingers into the collar of Denby's coat and lifted him without effort. He swung the smaller man around a little, pushed and Denby went over the side of the launch to splash in a foot of smelly water. He threshed frantically for a moment; then clawed his way to his feet and floundered to the higher ground. Hardesty grinned wolfishly and then turned to the girl.

"Baby," he said, "It'd be a hell of a shame if you was to get them little feet of yourn wet."

She slipped over the side and down into the water before he could reach her—she hadn't forgotten the feel of his hands back there at Five Oaks. Mud sucked at her feet and the water was warm with an unpleasant, soiled warmness. Then she felt firm ground beneath her. Hardesty was splashing behind, swearing, as she started up the aisle between the trees.

IT WAS almost dark in here, and she could no longer see Borger and the other two men. Panic gripped her and she started to run. Then a hand closed on her arm and she felt herself spun around.

"Take it easy, sister," Hardesty said in a coaxing voice. "Hell, there ain't any hurry. We'll just walk along slow, see?"

They went on for ten minutes, climbing a little as the ground sloped up. Then Borger grunted with satisfaction and said: "Here."

Borger had brought her a blanket and the girl wrapped it about her and sat with her back against a tree trunk. Smoke had thrown a fresh armload of wood onto the fire and it blazed up with a swift flame. Shadows danced a slow measure against the trees and there was a red glow on the gray beards of the moss which dripped, like furred icicles, from the branches above.

She looked at her watch and saw that it was nine o'clock. Across the fire Big Dan Borger had spread out the diagram which he had taken from the sandalwood chest, and was studying it by the light of the flames. Smoke looked over his shoulder and Duke Erhgott talked earnestly in a low voice. Then Borger nodded and began to fold up the paper.

He stood up and walked across to where Slim Hardesty squatted on his heels. Erhgott took three long flashlights from a canvas bag and tested them to see that their batteries were all right.

Borger's voice lifted a little so that Felice could hear what he said. "We're going to have a look for the gold. You'll stay here and keep an eye on these two. Understand?" The fat man's gaze swung around to where the girl sat. Then he turned his attention back to Hardesty. "There won't be any funny business, Slim. I'll feed you to the gators if there is! You understand?"

"Sure," Hardesty told him sullenly. "I understand it."

Borger grunted and turned away. Erhgott handed him one of the flashlights, and presently the three of them were lost in the shadows.

TIME crawled by on leaden feet. The rain stopped finally, but the leafy roof, above the girl's head, still dripped. Eleven-thirty, she saw. Slim Hardesty got up to throw another armful of wood onto the fire and the flames blazed up cheerfully. Hardesty was drinking from a flat bottle which he carried in his pocket. A dozen feet away Clyde Denby sat, gazing sullenly into the fire.

In spite of herself Felice Denby dozed. She fought the drowsiness off but it returned worse than ever. Finally she dropped off into an uneasy sleep. Fan-

tastic dreams disturbed her. She was back at Five Oaks. William Harrison was standing there in the great bare room with his arms lifted and the red of firelight behind him. He chanting crazily and she listened to him.

"Old Corkle Soor can see it plainly, for Old Corkle Soor can see through the years! Then will John Bradoon's gold be found!"

She awoke with a start. It was after two and the fire was still blazing up so that the shadows leaped and cavorted. Hardesty was sitting there across the fire looking at her, and she shivered a little as her eyes traveled across him. He drank again, a long drink with his head tipped back. Then he threw the bottle far out into the shadows and pushed himself to his feet. He was drunk, she saw.

He came around the fire, lurching a little. She screamed and tried to get to her feet, but the blanket tripped her. Then Hardesty's fingers were in her hair and he swung her around and slapped her hard in the face with his right hand.

"We're goin' to the boat, baby," he said in a thick voice. "Slim Hardesty's got a card or two to play in this game."

He slid a rough arm about her waist and turned toward the lake, half dragging her. She tried to pull away but he slapped her again, hard. Clyde Denby suddenly pawed his way to his feet and stumbled around the fire, his face wild.

"You're taking the boat, Hardesty?" His voice lifted crazily. "You can't leave me here! I'm going with you!"

He staggered up to the man, clawing at his arm frantically. Hardesty swore and swung with his right arm. It was a glancing blow, but Denby staggered back and almost fell into the fire. Half carrying the girl, Hardesty turned into the dim aisle which led down to where the boat was tied. Denby ran after him shouting mad gibberish at the top of his lungs.

"You can't do it! You can't do it! I'll go crazy here in this jungle!"

Hardesty paused at the outer edge of the shadows, his face wicked. His right hand dropped, then. He shot, the wicked *spang* leaping through the trees. Denby sagged at the knees and went down. For a moment Hardesty stood there looking at him. Denby had pushed himself up onto his hands and knees and was crawling, his voice whimpering ahead of him. "I'll go mad! I'll go mad!"

Hardesty smiled thinly as he lifted the gun with a cold deliberation. He shot again, then twice more, and Denby rolled over on his face and lay still.

"You're wrong, feller," Hardesty said. "You ain't goin' mad after all!"

A moment later the roar of the engine tore into the quiet of the night as the boat moved out into the lake and headed back for the entrance to Banshee Bayou.

CHAPTER V

WAR AT RIVER CASTLE

CONSCIOUSNESS came slowly back into Felice Denby. She had the sensation of motion, but for a moment she could not remember where she was. Something sharp was pressing into her side, and she tried to move to ease the discomfort, but found that her wrists were tied. She remembered then.

She saw the dim outlines of trees passing on either side, as her eyes became accustomed to the blackness, and knew that they were going back down the bayou. The engine made a steady mutter of sound which echoed back from the branches overhead. She caught the dim outline of Hardesty's shoulders as he bent above the wheel. He was singing drunkenly.

She moved cautiously until she was half sitting, half lying against the rail of the open boat. Hardesty had tied her wrists well, passed the end of the rope through a ringbolt and she couldn't reach the knots. She jerked until her wrists were raw and then gave up, finally, with the sickening realization that those cords weren't going to loosen.

An hour passed, then another; faint light began to trickle down through the green roof. Trees took shape slowly as the daylight grew; Slim Hardesty, still hunched over the wheel, materialized out of the gloom. He sang on, beating time with the flat whiskey bottle.

"What yuh gonna do with a drunken sai-lor!"

The sun was two hours up when he

cut the throttle at the end of a quarter mile stretch of straight water and turned the nose of the boat into the bank. The boat lost way, drifted in toward a clump of trees and bumped gently. Hardesty climbed forward and tossed a line about one of the trunks.

"Borger'll do some swimmin' to find us here," he said maliciously. "That's right, ain't it, baby?"

He came on back and sat down on the thwart opposite her. His eyes were red from much liquor. Then he leaned forward, shoving the bottle towards her.

"Have a drink, baby. You look kind of peaked this mornin'. Come on, take it. Take it!"

Felice said desperately: "Untie my hands and I'll take it."

For a minute Hardesty stared at her owlishly. Then he threw back his head and laughed—crazy laughter which rocked him back and forth until he nearly toppled into the water. Then his voice dropped confidentially.

"Smart, see? That's me. Borger'll find the gold, but he ain't goin' to swim out of here with no gold. I know Borger. He'll go crazy when he finds th' boat's gone. Clean crazy, baby. He'll run off th' swamp maybe, or he'll blame it on Smoke or Duke an' there'll be shootin'. They won't get out."

He drank again and allowed his eyes to travel across the girl slowly.

"Now you just take it easy, pretty. Old Slim's gonna get a little shut-eye an' then he'll untie you. He wouldn't want to take no chances of you pickin' up an' leavin'. Just don't you get impatient. We're gonna be here for a long time, baby. We'll get along fine."

He finished the whiskey and flipped the bottle over into the muddy water, then stumbled aft. The girl twisted around a little so she could watch him. He stretched out with an arm over his eyes, and presently she heard the sound of his heavy breathing.

AN HOUR passed. The heat had become a thick, unhealthy thing, and insects swarmed about the girl's face until she bit her lips to keep from screaming. For the hundredth time she twisted herself to get away from them, and then the fingers of her left hand touched something hard. She explored it with her fingertips and found it was an edged nail head, protruding a little from the side of the boat. Swift hope lifted in her.

By bending herself back and pushing her arms down hard she found that she could drag the rope across that nail head. An infinitesimal bit of the fiber gave way.

The steamy heat was thickening; it seemed to close in around her head in a smelly blanket which made breathing difficult. Slow, heart-breaking work. Her arms ached and a dull pain had settled into her shoulders so that she had to stop until it eased.

It must be past noon, she guessed. Hardesty still slept, sprawled out on his back. Felice worked on. Her wrists were bleeding now and she could feel the stickiness of the blood on her fingers.

Then, suddenly, she knew that the ropes had loosened a little. She hunched her shoulders and worked faster. Sweat trickled down her face to drip off the point of her chin, and gnats hovered in a maddening crowd about her face, but she didn't notice now. She could work her right wrist around a little.

She could have cried out with relief as her right hand slid free. She swung about and began to work frantically at the rope which still held her left—two minutes more was all she needed.

Hardesty snorted and rolled over onto his side. Felice jerked viciously in a mad effort to slip those last clinging strands. They tightened and she forced herself to pick at them methodically. Then Hardesty sat up, prying at his eyes with his fingers. He looked forward and understood and his mouth twisted in an ugly snarl as he scrambled to his feet.

The boat tipped uncertainly as he stumbled forward. Felice worked with a fierce concentration. Then the last strand of the rope came loose and she was free. She scrambled to her feet, tried desperately to dive over into the brown water, but she was too late.

Hardesty's reaching hand closed on her shoulder, jerked her back so that she

fell against him. His arms were around her and he was bending her back as she screamed and struck at his face with ineffectual fists. He laughed deep in his throat. She felt his fingers fumbling at the throat of her blouse.

AFTER he had left the fire Big Dan Borger walked swiftly up along an aisle through the trees, with Smoke and Duke Erhgott at his heels. His powerful flashlight stabbed out a white path in front of him. The ground still sloped gently upward. At the crest of that rise, he guessed, he would find River Castle.

A bat brushed across Smoke's face and he swore viciously and swung his light in a long circle.

Big Dan Borger paid no attention. The trees were thinning and the crest of the knoll was ahead. He grinned in the darkness; with luck he'd have the gold on board the boat by daybreak. There was plenty of liquor and they would all celebrate then. Presently, while the rest were sleeping it off, he would take the girl and the gold and slip on off down the bayou alone.

He chuckled and spat into the rain.

The slender beam of the light, dancing ahead, stopped against a green wall which materialized suddenly at the edge of the trees. Borger stopped, the others gathering around him while the three lights moved in slow arcs.

"Well, I'll be damned," Smoke said thickly. "I'd never believed I'd find that here! Hey, it *is* a castle!"

Borger grunted. Ahead of them was a great pile of gray stone half hidden by vines and creepers. Part of it had fallen into tumbled ruin, but one end still towered dimly up into the tree tops—the castle which John Bradoon had built when he had tired of his piracies.

They went forward slowly, picking their way through the worn rubble, and then the searching fingers of the lights picked out the black gap which had once been the main doorway. Steps led up and the three climbed them slowly. Duke Erhgott swore as a mottled snake slid away from under his feet and was lost in the darkness. Borger laughed and turned his beam on the big doorway.

"Where's that machete, Smoke?"

"I got it here," Smoke said in a subdued voice. "I don't like this place, Dan. Maybe we better wait until daylight. There ain't no tellin' what a man's liable to find in there."

Borger sneered at him. "Getting cold feet, eh? I've always known that you had a streak of yellow up your back, Smoke. Give me that machete!" Borger reached across and took the heavy knife out of Smoke's fingers. "Now—hold the light, Duke. Smoke, you haul out these vines as I chop them loose."

It was hot work. Sweat glistened in bright beads on Big Dan Borger's face, and the light ran swiftly along the chopping knife. Then the tangle thinned and he was able to pull the vines aside and worm his way through. The other two followed.

They were in a big room, paved with flags which had been thrust up at a dozen angles by the white and sickly vegetation which covered the floor. Borger moved forward slowly, his light sweeping across the walls.

There had been windows here once, but now they, like the doorway, were choked with a solid green wall. The roof was still solid, and at the far end of the hall a staircase wound upward to dispear into a square doorway at the top. Water slowly oozed out between the stones of the walls; the flags, underfoot, were slimy with ancient decay.

"I'm gettin' out of here!" Smoke said thickly.

He half turned, but Big Dan Borger dropped a fat hand on his arm and spun him about.

"You're staying until I tell you to go," he snarled. "Come on!"

HE LED the way across to the staircase and the three climbed slowly up the stone steps. A bat brushed by Erhgott's face and he slapped at it and nearly fell. At the top they went through the square door and found that a corridor, walled with stone, turned toward the right and ended in more steps.

They went on up, to come out, finally,

on a stone landing which looked down on the sloping ground outside the castle. Borger turned his light downwards. A single gnarled and crooked tree, dying of old age, thrust its bare limbs up just beneath them; farther down, Borger could see the pile of rubble over which they had climbed to reach the castle door.

"This is the place," he mumbled under his breath. "Lucky it's not fallen in, at that. Hold the light, Smoke."

The rain had stopped; a moon was beginning to break through the clouds and trickle a thin, ghostly light across the narrow lake out there in front. Somewhere, deep in the fastnesses of the swamp, an animal cried out with a long and shivering wail; the sound died lingeringly on a thin note. Smoke's fingers were shaking as he held the electric torch so that the pencil of light flooded over Borger's shoulder and onto the faded diagram which John Bradoon had drawn over a century before. Drawn it here at Bayou Banshee.

"Here's the start," Borger grunted exultantly and pointed with a dirty forefinger. "The little lookout platform at the head of the stairs. We go back down the stairs for five steps. The door is at the sixth step!"

"Let's go," Duke Erhgott said thinly. "This damned moonlight is gettin' on my nerves!"

They retraced their steps, Borger counting aloud. "One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . six!"

The sixth step was some three feet wide, almost a landing, and the three of them stood there, their flashlights exploring the walls. There was nothing but slimy gray stones—no sign of a crack and no sign of a door. Borger swore.

"Hammer on the stone," he ordered harshly. "This has got to be the place!"

The excitement of gold had gotten into them and, for an hour, they worked frantically. The walls gave no sign of ever having been disturbed; they were as solid and tight as the day the masons had joined them together. Borger snapped the blade of his machete off short trying to pry it into the cracks between the grey blocks. He swore viciously and slammed the useless handle down against the broad stone step. It clanged sharply.

Borger's eyes narrowed and he got down on his knees on the seventh step to hold his light close and squint at the stone. Three inches of the step projected in front and, after a minute, he straightened.

"Get off," he ordered curtly. The other two stepped down beside him. "Duke, you hold the light, Smoke, you lend a hand here. Move, damn you!"

The two of them hooked their fingers under that projecting three inches of stone. "Up!" Borger grunted. They lifted mightily but the step didn't move.

"Put the light down and get hold of here!"

The three of them braced themselves and put their weight into the lift. The slab stirred. They heaved again and the front tipped up slowly.

"By God, this is it!"

A black hole was opening in front of them, and the slab moved more easily now, rocking back on an invisible pivot. It stopped, then, but there was an opening three feet long and wide enough for a man to climb through. Borger seized a flashlight and thrust his head through the opening.

A rock-walled shaft dropped straight down for a dozen feet; a narrow doorway led away at the bottom. Iron rungs, fastened into the stone and eaten with rust, led down.

"Hold the light," Borger said in a thick voice, "I'm going down!"

He thrust his own flashlight into the front of his shirt and squeezed himself into the opening. It was a tight fit, but he got through, hung there for a moment supported by his arms while he felt for the rungs of the ladder. He found them then; tested them cautiously and felt the rotten scale flake away under his weight. The rung held and he went on down.

On the bottom he peered up for a moment while he fumbled for the flashlight. The faces of the other two were dim up there and he laughed soundlessly. He was going to need help to get this gold to the boat; after that he could get along without Smoke and Duke Erhgott.

A narrow passage led off to the right,

and he knew that he was in the middle of the thick walls of River Castle. There had been a door once, but the wood had rotted away and lay in a crumbling heap on the door sill. He stepped across it and went on down the passage.

A smell of mouldering decay was thick against his nostrils. Then his light showed him the ruins of another door and he went through it to find himself in a small room.

John Bradoon's treasure lay before him.

Two chests stood on the bare stone floor, but the dampness had burst their wooden sides so that a dull flood of metal lay spewed around them. For a moment Borger stood there, his eyes gloating; then he strode forward to thrust his hands into that heap of treasure.

"Gold! By God, gold!"

Heavy stuff! He lifted up a double handful and let it trickle down through his fingers to clink against those thousands of pieces there on the floor. A smaller chest, standing against the wall, caught his eye and he went across to drop on his knees beside it. The thin rapier of his flashlight exploded into a thousand separate and tiny flames—the white brilliance of diamonds; rubies, blood-red and alive with warm and leaping flames; the cool green of emeralds.

He squatted there, his fingers shaking as he reached out to touch them. They were his—his! He thought of those two waiting up above, and his lips lifted into a snarl as he half reached for the gun at his hip. They'd never get their fingers on them! Then he relaxed and grinned wolfishly. He needed help first. Later would be time enough for that.

He got slowly to his feet and went back toward the shaft.

THE boat chugged patiently around the winding meanders of the bayou, while McCord squatted in the bow and cursed helplessly at their slow progress. It was past noon now, and still each bend brought nothing except a muddy stretch of stagnant water and another curve ahead. Walker Gant sat at the wheel, his face imperturbable.

McCord growled irritably: "Can't you get this damned tub to move any faster, Gant? I could swim off and leave it!"

"Go ahead, if you're in a hurry," Gant told him indifferently.

McCord stuffed tobacco morosely into his own pipe. It was damp and the smoke tasted bad. He knocked his pipe out again and thrust it back into his pocket. He was reaching for the water bag when he heard the shrill lift of a woman's scream.

Gant swung the boat hard over so that they scraped the mud bank as they rounded the bend just ahead. They veered back into the middle of the bayou, and McCord swore under his breath as his right hand jerked up to the Luger at his shoulder.

Another boat was tied to the bank fifty feet away. A man and a woman struggled there—Felice Denby and the slim man who had taken his gun away that night in Cachelot Street. Cold rage drew a thin wire through McCord's brain.

Slim Hardesty had let go of the girl, was stumbling aft toward the rifle which lay on the thwart. McCord shot, the spang of the Luger cutting cleanly through the moist heat, but the unsteady boat threw the bullet wild; he saw the little spit of water as it struck a dozen yards upstream..

The two boats were a scant ten feet apart when Hardesty swung up the rifle. His eyes glared wildly as he jerked back the hammer and whirled toward where the girl crouched in the bow.

"You—I'll fix—"

McCord jumped and the rifle exploded in his ear as his shoulder smashed into Hardesty. The two of them fell across the rail; slid on over into the muddy water.

McCord came up spitting. The two boats were close together and a dozen feet away from him as he started to swim. Gant was half crouched, a knee on the gunwhale of the boat, as McCord came alongside and reached a hand up. For a second the two men stared at each other, and McCord saw that there was a haggard look about the other's face—a bitter, half mocking light at the back of his eyes. He understood, suddenly.

Then Gant reached for his hand and pulled him up. Neither spoke as they turned to watch the muddy surface of the bayou while they waited for Hardesty to reappear. It was Walker Gant who saw him first.

"There, by the bend," he said in a flat voice. "Take care of the girl."

McCord stumbled into the bow, dropped a soaked arm across Felice Denby's shoulders and she pressed close to him, shivering. McCord, too, shivered a little as he looked.

Hardesty had drifted close to the opposite bank before he had come up. Now stark terror distorted the man's face at something he saw beneath him, and he splashed in a frantic and hopeless effort to reach the bank. The water boiled into sudden foam behind him. He screamed once, a terrible and inhuman sound, and then he was gone. The bayou had taken him.

The girl was crying, her shoulders jerking in deep sobs as she leaned against McCord's arm. He quieted her, fed her a stiff dose of brandy and then wrapped a soggy blanket about her shoulders.

They went on up the bayou, leaving the second boat still tied where they had found it. The steamy heat pressed close and the muffled *chug-chug* of the engine was a monotonous beat in the afternoon. McCord picked up the Luger, from where he had dropped it when he dived at Hardesty; reloaded it and slipped it back into the shoulder holster. Walker Gant was sitting there, his shoulders hunched forward a little, while he stared somberly at the brown length of the slough which slowly unwound in front of them.

IT WAS long after dark and the moon had risen when the boat broke out of the tunnel which arched over the bayou, and nosed out into the shallow lake at River Castle. McCord shut off the engine and they drifted silently in the deep shadows close to the left hand bank. Presently he saw the line of ancient piles which, Felice had told him, marked the landing.

They nosed into the shallows fifty yards below; at McCord's word, Gant tied the boat close under the overhang of a tree clump. The night was quiet except for the steady drone of the millions of insects as McCord picked up a flashlight and felt to see that the Luger was snug in its holster. He spoke in a low voice to Gant.

"I'm going ashore," he said evenly. "I want to scout around a little and see how the land lies."

"I'll go."

McCord shook his head. "I'm used to the jungle. Somebody's got to stay with the boat. It had better be you."

"You trust me, do you?"

"You haven't got the gold aboard," McCord told him dryly. "I trust you."

Gant stared at him soberly for a long minute and then shrugged his shoulders. The something beaten in the man's face —something which McCord couldn't put his finger on but which he vaguely understood.

Gant said: "I'll be here when you get back. God knows why."

Moonlight filtered through the leafy roof to lie in mottled patches ahead of McCord as he climbed slowly up the sloping ground. He swung away to his left, and presently his eyes found the first of the signs for which he was looking—the huddled body of a man. He knelt and flashed on his light, shielding the glow with his body.

It was Clyde Denby, blood smeared across his face and his lips drawn back in an expression of terror. He was dead. McCord got to his feet again and went on.

He came out into the little opening and saw, in the moonlight in front of him, the ruined pile of what had once been River Castle. There was no sign of life about it, but he waited, listening, for a long moment. Borger and his two men were here somewhere; it was not likely that they would already have started to make their way back across the miles of swamp.

Moving swiftly, he climbed over the pile of rubble in front of the doorway and went into the big hall. The beam of light showed him the slimy walls, the stairway, nothing else. He snapped it out and stood listening, but there was no sound except the rustling wings of the

disturbed bats and the slow drip of water.

The bright beam of the light stabbed out ahead of him again as he went across the upturned flags and began to climb slowly up the stairs. He came to the first landing, stopped suddenly with swift excitement running through him. Borger had been here! Canvas bags lay stacked in a heap against the wall—dozens of them! He knew, even before he reached out to touch their hard fullness, that here was John Bradoon's treasure.

It happened suddenly.

Three spears of light centered on him from a ruined doorway to the left, and big Dan Borger's voice grated out of the darkness.

"Drop that gun, damn you!"

McCord swore. They were three to one and hidden by the darkness, while he was spotlighted in the glare of the electric torches. The Luger slipped from his fingers to clatter against the stone and he heard Borger laugh.

"He'll have a boat, maybe somebody with him, Smoke," Borger said. "You and Duke get back down to the lake and get that boat. Bring it up to the landing. Then come back and we'll start loading the gold."

"How about this feller?" Smoke asked.

"I'll take care of him." There was a vicious undertone in Borger's voice. "Shooting might be heard at the boat. I'll just drop him down into the well, where the gold was, and close the step down."

The two of them went past McCord and on down the stairs.

THE muzzle of a gun jabbed into McCord's ribs and Borger's voice lifted: "Get up those steps, you!"

They climbed slowly, the gun jammed hard against McCord's back and Borger's light dancing eerily on the stone ahead. They turned a corner, climbed to the right and then turned back to the left again. Then they were on a narrow landing and McCord saw the black gap of the hole with the stone step tilted back above it.

"Shine your light into it, friend," Borger said with a vicious satisfaction. "That's going to be home to you for a hell of a long while. Take a look at it!"

The light flooded downward and McCord saw the narrow well, the rusty iron rungs jutting out from the stone. The second rung had torn away so that it formed a hook with a wicked, jagged point pointing up at the opening.

"Get closer! Take a good look!" Borger said. He jabbed viciously with the gun and McCord half staggered toward the waiting hole.

It was now or never, McCord thought.

He dropped and flung himself backward against the fat man's knees. Borger's gun spat viciously, an echoing roar here between the narrow walls, and McCord felt a swift thread of pain rip across his left shoulder. His light had fallen on the steps below and it still burned, a pale spot of light which threw heavy shadows along the steps.

McCord twisted like a cat and the reaching fingers of his left hand fastened about Borger's wrist; he fought with a silent, harsh concentration to bend that wrist back, keep that gun away from his body. It went off again, the slug burning through the sleeve of his shirt to slam wickedly against the stone.

There was an unsuspected strength beneath Borger's fat, McCord knew. The big man was trying to claw himself free, but the narrowness of the stairs hampered his efforts.

Borger's elbow smashed into McCord's throat and he felt a dizzying wave of pain surge up into his forehead. He fought the blackness away. Then the straining fingers of his left hand touched Borger's wrist and he got the leverage of both arms into a steady pull. The wrist came back, inch by inch. Borger snarled with the pain of it; lifted himself to slam McCord back against the stone, but the smaller man hung on.

Then McCord was on his knees, braced against the steps and he got the full weight of his shoulders into that hammerlock. Borger's wrist came back faster now; the light shone slickly on the beads of sweat which oozed out of the fat man's face. McCord tightened the hold slowly.

Crack!

The arm suddenly went limp in Mc-

Cord's hands and Borger screamed, a wailing lift of sound which echoed dully against the walls. The gun clattered down the steps. McCord broke away. Anger was a white hot pencil in his brain as he smashed at the other's face. Borger was stumbling to his feet.

"One for that blonde you dumped in the river, Borger!" McCord said between his teeth.

He drove the big man backward with stabbing knuckles which laid flesh open to the bone. Borger was slobbering brokenly; trying to get away—he slipped, then, and fell forward and the waiting mouth of the shaft swallowed him. He started to scream but the sound was cut off in his throat with a terrible suddenness.

McCord picked up the light; went back down the steps a little way to where Borger's gun lay. He picked that up, too; saw that there was a cartridge in the chamber and then climbed slowly back to the tipped step and the well which had led to John Bradoon's treasure.

The light threw the thing into harsh detail as he knelt above the shaft. The hook, made by that broken steel rung, had caught Borger about the throat and he hung there in its grasp, his neck broken.

After a little, McCord climbed above the tilted step, braced himself with his feet above it and pushed. The step stirred slowly, began to move. Then it settled swiftly down into the position in which it had lain for so many years.

McCord felt sick and old as he went back down the steps. He paused by the sacks of gold to pick up the Luger and then went on. The night air, outside the ruined doorway of the big hall, tasted sweet and good after the smell of the ancient decay inside. He filled his lungs gratefully.

The sound of a shot drifted suddenly across the moonlight. It was followed by half a dozen more. McCord broke into a run toward the lake.

THE firing died away as McCord ran. He stumbled once, catching a foot in a trailing vine, and went headlong into the damp mold. The shoulder, where Borger's bullet had cut a long furrow, hurt with a burning and insistent pain.

A man was groaning down there was the lake's edge. McCord flattened himself against the bole of a big tree and called out softly.

"Gant!"

Walker Gant's voice answered from a clump of dark shadows a dozen feet away. There was a sardonic amusement in the big gambler's voice which puzzled McCord a little. Farther off, to the right, the other man was still groaning.

Gant said: "Come on in, McCord. The party's over, but there's still work left for a good man with a spade."

McCord flicked on the switch of the flashlight and allowed the beam to travel slowly across the little clearing. Close at hand a man lay on his face, his arms stretched out in front of him.

"That's Duke Erhgott," Walker Gant's voice said with a calm detachment. "You'll find him shot through the head, I think. The one that's groaning over there is Smoke. I put two bullets in him but he dies hard."

McCord went slowly toward the shadows. The light showed him the gambler, seated with his back against a tree and a gun lying in his lap. The tight set of the man's lips told McCord that he, too, was wounded.

It was clear enough what had happened. Borger's two men had jumped the boat from different directions, but Gant had been ashore waiting for them. Smoke lay in a patch of moonlight with his legs drawn up and his hands clasped across his stomach. He was dying, McCord saw, as he turned away.

The girl was already kneeling beside Walker Gant, half crying as she tried to ease him down onto the ground. A blue hole punctured Gant's chest down low and McCord knew that there was nothing that he could do. Gant seemed to read his thoughts.

"Cover me up—friend McCord," he said in a labored voice. "I know when—I'm—done in."

Felice Denby got brandy from the boat and McCord eased the wounded man up a little and held the bottle to his lips. Gant drank, the liquor dribbling down across his chin.

The dark amusement flared in his eyes again.

He was going fast, McCord saw. Felice was crying softly and Gant turned his head a little to look at her. Some of the hardness seemed to go out of the man's face and his lips twisted up into a crooked smile.

"All my life—I have made it a point—to take what I have wanted." His eyes were steady on the girl. "Today I—failed to do that. I am—glad—now."

Walker Gant closed his eyes.

Felice was crying as she bent over him.

THE BOAT rode low in the brown water of the lake; a paulin had been thrown over the stacked canvas sacks which were piled amidships. Early afternoon and, in a few minutes now, they would push away from this dark and somber place and go back down Bayou Banshee to civilization.

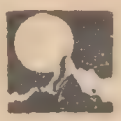
McCord stood under the trees for a moment. His face was tired and old; a darkly stained bandage bound his left shoulder. Three freshly turned graves stood in a row in one of the aisles beneath the trees; closer there was another grave with an inscription cut into the tree which guarded it.

Walker Gant.
A Square Gambler.

Felice Denby came to stand beside McCord and he dropped his arm across her shoulders. They stood looking for a long moment and then turned away.

Presently the *putt-putt* of the engine awoke the echoes across the narrow lake. The sound died away slowly as the green arch of Bayou Banshee closed about the slowly moving boat.

Epilogue



NIGHT closed down swiftly on River Castle. The rising moon broke free from the reaching arms of the jungle and its light flickered over the gray and ruined walls in a soft glow. That same moon had looked down on River Castle in other days—had looked down on a night when a giant Negro had swayed in front of a fire, waving his arms while his chant lifted on the hot wind.

Silhouetted like a huge bat in front of the dancing flames. Laughing in a wild uplift of sound. Old Corkle Soor, who could see through the years.

"A man will come. . . . John Bradoon's blood in his veins . . . hang Arble Thine's spawn. . . . Then will the gold be found. . ."

The same moon had looked down on it all, looked while Arble Thine and his men had shivered there beneath the trees. Now that moon looked down on the ruins of John Bradoon's castle and, deep within that castle, one of Arble Thine's breed hung with a great hook about his neck.

So had Corkle Soor's prophecy come true.

WARNING TO CRANKS

If you want to stay cranky, look out for Star Single-edge Blades! They're so keen, they're so gentle with a tender skin that if you're not careful, you'll be smiling all over. Famous since 1880! Star Blades cost little: 4 for 10¢. Star Blade Division, Brooklyn, N. Y.

STAR SINGLE-EDGE BLADES 4 FOR 10¢
FOR GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS

"Hunched in his shell like a turtle. Come on, I'll fix him!"

ENEMY BOOTS

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

EBEN GLASGOW sat hunched over on the snowy ground. Painfully, he tightened the knots in the rags that bound the worn and broken soles to the uppers of his shoes. The breath puffed in frozen vapor from his unshaven lips; his cold-reddened nose found no warmth in the late December sunshine.

"By gosh, if this ain't Christmas cheer! Colder'n charity." He paused to blow on his fingers. "Dangnation on a war where a man's got to fight barefoot in winter!"

"You ain't getting faint heart in the cause of liberty, Eben?" sardonically croaked Pardon James, also engaged upon bandaged feet. Both men were of

Colonel John Stark's New Hampshire Continentals.

"I'm gettin' tarnation sore feet. They're cracked open to the raw; this march to the river 'most finished 'em." Glasgow flung a defiant glare at the group of shivering, crouching men around. "This is what we 'listed for! The militia get ten dollars bounty paid down, for six weeks' sarvice, and light out for home the day it's up. We get nothin' at all, and no boots neither."

Somebody grunted wearily. "Don't blame 'em for lighting out. Ain't no glory gettin' licked all the time. Looks like Gen'ral Washington just can't win a fight no way."

"Well," snapped Glasgow, "I 'listed in the Continentals for a year, come January first. Six days more and I'll light out too, my feet near as bare as my pockets. Liberty be dummed! It ain't worth while, withouten shoes."

A few heads wagged somberly, in dejected agreement.

"Congress says now it'll pay in hard money, 'stead o' them wuthless notes," spoke up Pardon, though doubtfully. "And if we 'list till the end o' the war, we get twenty dollars bounty and a hundred acres of land."

"My mind's on boots," snarled Glasgow, and meant his words. Just now, boots meant more to him than liberty, pay or anything else.

"Them Hessians in Trenton, acrost the river below," said Pardon wheezily, "are powerful snug, with their Christmas schnapps and all. The furren hirelings! And us Americans freezing with nary a tent! I hear Colonel Stark has offered twenty-five dollars to any man in the ranks who captures an officer and a sword."

With a growl, Eben Glasgow finished his work and relaxed. He curled numb fingers into the cover of ragged mittens, rubbed at his long red nose, and tugged at the bit of blanketing tied over his ears.

"Ding their schnapps and swords both! When I get acrost into Trenton, I aim to ketch me a pair of shoes off'n one o' them Dutchmen, so's I can go home decent next week."

"Ain't you re-enlisting?" demanded someone listlessly. Glasgow snorted.

"I'll be setting to home, stirrin' a mug of cider with a hot poker! But first, we'll all get shod yonder in Trenton, if we ain't drowned gettin' there."

"We will not," said Pardon. "Over there is Colonel Rall and fifteen hundred Hessians, and we got twenty-five hundred men or up'ards. Figger the shoe question for yourself. It's first come, first grab. Did you enlist for boots or freedom?"

"If I got to choose, I'll take the boots," snapped Glasgow. "Sooner I swap shoes with some Dutchman, better patriot I'll be. I need number tens or better, too."

Shaggy heads wagged again, ragged garments were drawn close. The first year of this war for Independence was closing in sorry fashion, with New York and New Jersey lost, and the enemy bragging that peace terms would be dictated in the hall of Congress when Philadelphia was taken.

On the run all the time, losing, losing. Meantime, the Jersey Tories who tied red rags to their doorposts sat by the fire in comfort. And today, no Christmas cheer. It was bleak and cold, sitting here on the wrong side of the Delaware and looking over at Jersey. The faint low sun was ringed with a storm halo. The drift of ice cakes in the sullen current rasped against the boats tied along the shore.

"When do we start acrost?" demanded somebody in a dreary voice.

"At dark. Aim to surprise 'em in their Christmas cups."

To these men the plan was no secret. To ferry the river before it froze tonight, and attack the Hessians in Trenton town, nine miles down.

"Well, we got the boats and they got the boots," said Glasgow, wincing as he eased his feet. "I'll make myself a Christmas present, you bet. Thank God them Dutchmen have got big feet!"

Orders were issued; the first troops filed into the waiting scows, bateaux, forty-foot keel boats, manned by Gloucester and Marblehead fishermen with poles and sweeps. The headquar-

ters staff boarded for passage. Glasgow, filing aboard, sighted the bulky cloaked figure of Washington, standing balanced for a moment before hunching down behind the bow polemen.

DUSK deepened into evening. Glasgow was wedged in among his comrades, dubiously eyeing the ice cakes, silent and ominous under the scudding moon. Murmurs and scuffles of elbowing men, snorting of horses, querulous voices of chilled and hungry men.

The moon was clouded over. The boats began to move. Flakes of snow swirled on the air; the rising wind had a high soughing note. The heavy craft were rammed through in a snaky column toward the low and spectral hills of the Jersey shore. The leading boats beached, discharged cargo, put back.

The snow thickened, mingling with spits of sleet, and the damp air soaked through to the skin.

"Won't be a dry firelock in the hull army," chattered Pardon James.

"Use the bayonet." Eben growled. "Close quarters, all the better! I don't hanker for shoes stone cold. I want a pair warm and limber; number tens."

"Aim to pick and choose?" jibed Pardon.

"You bet. How long do we wait here?"

"Got to ferry over the rest of the troops. Then we got twenty guns and the battery hosses."

"Going to take a thundering long time, specially if the ice jams. Powder wet. It's now or never, looks like." Glasgow flung a glance around. The men had scattered in groups, shielding their muskets, huddling for mutual protection against the storm. He and Pardon James were together.

"Doesn't help my country none, for me to be standing here with wet priming and sore feet," he went on. "By gosh, I'm a-going down to Trenton and ketch a picket. Might ketch an officer and sword, too! Come on, Pardon; we'll bag us a couple. What say?"

"Durned if I don't!" agreed the other. "But John Stark will be powerful mad."

"We'll be back 'fore daylight. If we lose out and don't bag a prize, we can just fall in and nobody'll know the differ. Come on."

They sifted away as though seeking shelter; no one paid any attention. All hands were intent on the river and the operations there.

Trudging along, they found the road dimly indicated by pasture fences and trees, slanting up hill and down hill. The storm drove in at an angle from the northeast, rapid snow plastering faces and bodies on that side.

"Lonely, dang it!" said Pardon James. "Half wish we hadn't come. S'posing they change their minds and all put back again? Then where'll we be?"

"On the side where the shoes are, by gum!"

They trudged endlessly along, with occasional grumbles from the nervous Pardon. It was a long time, well past midnight, when a few yellowish lights winked through the reek that veiled the outskirt groves and orchards.

"Trenton, by gum!" wheezed Pardon. "What now?"

"The road's the most likely place for pickets, ain't it? Their guns are wet as our'n; if they sight us, use the bayonet! It won't hurt their boots none."

Eben Glasgow was actually beginning to enjoy himself.

The lights of the town signaled ruddy comfort. They forged ahead and drew closer when Pardon, his numbed feet stumbling, crashed into a piece of fence, with clatter and curse. On the instant, a form sprang into view ahead, another towered ghostly in the whitened gloom, and a guttural challenge rang out.

"Who comes?"

"Into 'em!" exclaimed Glasgow, and broke into a run.

Two muskets flamed. The air shook, as two indistinct figures turned and ran. They wore tall grenadier hats and watch coats. As they clumped along, they bawled wild alarm, and other shouts gave response.

A turn of the road broke upon the glow of a fire; half a score other figures were rushing forward. Wild shots rang out, the alarm spread. Glasgow, with

a muttered oath, halted his rush and drew Pardon aside amid some saplings.

"Picket outpost, damn it! In another minute we'd have ketched them two! Lay low."

They waited, shivering, while German voices lifted excitedly.

"Well, that cooks the goose," muttered Pardon. "Hear them drums? That's the turnout. We better get back."

"Hold on." Glasgow leveled a wistful regard at the town lights, and then eyed the indistinct figures around the fire. "I got an idear. Come this way—careful, now! If they search the road and find nobody, they'll think them two were dreaming."

He led the way, circling. The falling snow had changed to sleet and pellet hail, edging the keen lash of wind. The roll of drums ceased. Trenton was too secure against the ragamuffin Americans, blocked off by the ice-thick river, to muster at alarm-shots by half-blinded pickets.

"We can get around behind that post," said Glasgow, pausing. "Them two didn't spy us till we were right on 'em. It'll be easier to ketch somebody in town than it is out here."

Pardon sniffled, and wiped his wet face with his sleeve.

"Well, we can allus run," he agreed.

THEY went on. The hissing storm dampered all slight sounds and curtained the air with a streaming tapestry. An orchard of gaunt apple trees intervened, and beyond it the town lights glimmered. They shone in a long row from the barracks, and ruddied the panes of houses with reflection of Yuletide flames. The streets were vacant, but the lusty notes of German hymns seeped from the houses.

"Durned if I don't feel like a homeless pup!" muttered Glasgow, as he limped into the lane that took them slap into the town. The scuffs and nervous sniffles of Pardon sounded behind him. At the first street he halted, peered around the corner, drew back with hasty word.

"Hold up! I see somebody."

"Coming?"

He peered again. "No. Standing. Sentry in front of a door, looks like. Right around this corner."

"Guarding some officer's billet, maybe," suggested Pardon.

"Got his back turned. Hunched in his shell like a turtle. Come on, I'll fix him!"

They stole forward at swift and greedy pace, the slight crunch of the sleet underfoot lost in the storm. The sentry loomed gigantic in his grenadier hat. He was collared to the ears, hugging his musket, wanly glistening in the light that came through frosted window panes.

Glasgow poised his musket. He drove the butt from his shoulder to the mark high between those other shoulders. The tall hat flew down the wind. With a grunt, the man pitched forward, shocked out of sense and movement. Glasgow jumped for him.

"Christmas gift of a slap on the back! Now for them shoes—quick! I got this one. You get the other off."

It was done. Glasgow took the pair, fingered them, squinted, held one to his foot.

"Dangnation! Too small," he rasped, in bitter disappointment.

"Suit me all right," came from Pardon. "Gimme that one."

"All right; your luck. I'll take this watch coat—warm back, anyhow."

"You'll be shot for a spy."

"A lot I care." Glasgow tugged at the buckles and dragged off the waist and cross belts. Pardon lent a hand. They rolled the Hessian out of his watch coat, and Glasgow wrestled into it.

"Aim to go now?" demanded Pardon.

"Ain't shod yet, partner. Can't leave him here anyhow, to freeze his feet. You take his legs, I'll lift his shoulders. Heave him right inside this door, then run for it and see what happens."

They lifted the Hessian and straightened him. Braced, Glasgow lifted the door-latch and swung the door with his knee.

No sound came at first; then the wheezing of Pardon was banished by throaty voices somewhere within. With a heave together, they shot the sentry

inside. His body crashed down. Glasgow clapped the door shut, and they ran for the corner.

There five minutes passed while they peered and waited. Nothing happened.

"One of us should have put on that Dutchman's rigging and played sentry," said Eben Glasgow. "Then we'd be ready to nab anybody—"

"Yah! And s'pose we got asked a question in Dutch?"

"That's right—Hey! Look!"

They stiffened. A shaft of yellow light from the opened door gilded the falling sleet. It cast the shadows of two figures athwart the storm. The shadows materialized. Two bared heads, one dark of pate, the other flaxen. Two bodies in white shirt undress. The senseless hulk of the sentry was tumbled down the step into the street.

The two figures followed, unsteadily. They stood, shirted and breeched, recovered balance, gravely pondered the situation with mutter of voices, then gave it up. They staggered back inside and the door slammed.

"Drunk, by gum!" muttered Pardon. "Fuddled, huh?"

"And big fellers," said Glasgow, delighted. "Havin' a party in there, had started to bed! Well, now I see where I'll pick me a pair of boots. Maybe ketch a sword as well, but boots come first."

Pardon hung back, hesitant, but finally swung into line, and they advanced. The sentry lay breathing raucously. The jovial merriment in the town had slackened. Glasgow listened at the door, which was unlocked; no sound came from inside. He opened the door gently. Pardon pressed in at his heels, and the weather was shut out.

Dim light showed a small alcove vestibule and parted hangings; through these, Eben Glasgow peered into a larger room. A Christmas night party had broken up. A littered table, chairs, playing cards, guttering candles, backlog in the fireplace lazily aflicker and, from an adjoining room, snores and gurgles. He grinned at Pardon, went to the opposite doorway, and drew back.

"I can see the two of 'em acrost a bed in there."

"This is heaven!" Pardon snatched at food on the table. "We can warm us inside and out. Look at this decanter—"

He froze abruptly; Glasgow clutched at his arm. Voices from the street, the scuffing of heavy feet, a tentative, inquiring fist pounding the door.

"They've found him!" breathed Glasgow. "Guard changed. Trying to rouse somebody."

The rap was repeated, imperatively. Fingers tapped at the windows. Voices lifted in guttural German.

"Take it the back way," muttered Glasgow. "Find it. I'll be with you in a jiffy. Got to get them boots—"

He plunged into the adjoining room. The two figures snored on the bed. He explored hastily, found clothes and boots heaped on the floor, caught up a pair of boots and retreated joyously. At the front door, fresh poundings—they would be in when they found it was unlocked. He ducked into the kitchen, out by the back door, and joined Pardon on the rear lean-to, piled with wood.

He plumped down, kicked off his tattered footgear, and wrestled with the boots. Pardon muttered impatiently. He stood up, stamped one foot home, stamped the other home, and grunted.

"Feel plaguey tight, but they're in! All right, let's go. Make for the lane, dodge for that orchard, same way we came."

THEY trudged on, found the lane again, and so came at last into the orchard at the town outskirts. Behind them, hasty lanterns bobbed, and lights flickered along the line of the barracks. Glasgow paused, stopped, and sank down.

"Hey! We got to git!" exclaimed Pardon anxiously. "What you stopping for?"

"My feet are limbered up and hurt like sixty. Specially the right one."

"Boots too small again?"

"No, it ain't that; my toes are free." Glasgow was wrestling with his boots. Into his voice came such consternation, such utter abysmal dismay, that Par-

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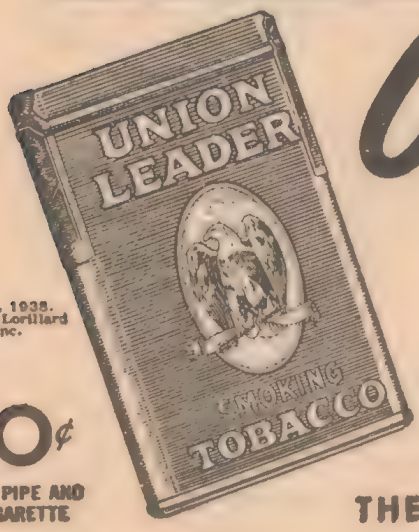

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don hurried to his side. "Oh, my gosh! This is terrible!"

"Huh? What's wrong?"

"I got on two lefts!"

"Oh!" said Pardon crossly. "Well, durn it, see them lights? You can't go back after a right boot now."

Glasgow rose. "Nope. Come on."

With a groan and a growling oath, he struck off. At limp and trudge they got through the orchard, swung around once more past the outpost, and came into the road. That wrong boot hurt consumedly, and Glasgow limped more and more. He was overcome by the savagely ironic fate which seemed to pursue his quest for footgear.

They began to foot the slow miles, the sleet and hail still beating tattoo.

"Looks pretty sartin' Gen'ral Washington won't attack tonight," observed Pardon. "We left him astraddle the river, and this is a mighty storm. Maybe he can't get back over the river himself. In that case, we'll be in time to join up. Otherwise, if we're too late, how do we get to t'other side the river?"

"That worry's a long way ahead," Glasgow snorted. "If we've been missed, we haven't got any officer with a sword, to make a showing. John Stark won't take footgear for excuse. Slacken up, Pardon. This pesky boot feels like a bear trap!"

They paused. The darkness, lightened by the ice and snow that sheathed earth and trees, seemed to be graying with promise of daylight. Then, through the stormy gusts, a confused sound filtered along the road; a steady shuffle, a faint rattle and jingle, a coughy murmur as of rasped lungs.

"By the Eternal—sojers!" gasped Eben Glasgow, startled. "Maybe the alarm we raised has got the redcoats out!"

"Not likely," argued Pardon, with anxious wheeze. "Not in this weather. Better step aside and lay low, Eben. If they're British, we may ketch a straggler and take him in."

They sought cover in a clump of naked ash, and waited.

The sounds approached, riding the patter of sleet. The head of the column darkened through the grayness, the column itself took shape and began to file past—a most amazing sight to their straining senses. No King's troops in warm coats and gaiters and boots. These men, marching at will, stumbling and slipping along, hunched to the storm, were Americans, after all!

"We're all right!" muttered Pardon. "Look there. Ain't that Stark? Attacking after all, by gum! Come on, Eben, we'll join in. Hope we ain't been missed!"

"They can't keep me in the army after my time's up, and I'm shod proper!" declared Glasgow. "Now I'll get me a right boot, you bet!"

They sidled out and fell in without challenge; the plodding files paid no heed to two obvious stragglers. This part of the column was made up of Pennsylvanians, and from the passed remarks, Glasgow gleaned news in plenty.

Three hours had been needed to get the last of the troops and artillery over the river. Washington and one column had taken another road; this was the Sullivan column. Too late now to make a surprise attack before daylight. Other troops had failed to get across, below Trenton, but Washington was going ahead regardless.

Pardon, who had pressed on in search of their own New Hampshire comrades, presently came back with uneasy report.

"I ain't been counted missing, Eben, but you have. You talked too much about wanting to quit."

"Does Stark suspect I wasn't along?"

"I dunno. I give out you had bad feet and had fell out to nurse 'em but would be along. You'd better not parade them boots yet; Stark's awful strict about straggling for plunder."

Pardon forged away for the home contingent. Glasgow was left to his limping hobble, and the spectre of Colonel John Stark, with long dour face and stern temper. Those discharge papers, due next week, began to look less promising.

THE morning drew on. By the brightening of the low gray sky, the sun was up, behind the storm clouds. The staggering column brisked with expec-

tancy. Down the road lay Trenton, silent and lifeless, streets and houses and flanking barracks all sheeted in icy snow. Only thin chimney fumes from smoldering Christmas hearths gave sign of a garrison lapsed into sodden slumber. Then, suddenly, everything woke up.

"Bang!" A lone sentry in the road fired and ran. On the other side of town roared out a cannon—that would be Washington's column arriving. The advance of the New Hampshire men doubled down the road to seize the street; the outpost legged hastily from its brush shelter. The Pennsylvanians broke into quickstep.

In the town, drums rolled and trumpets shrilled. Barracks and houses came alive in a great eruption of men, uttering strange cries, buckling belts, stumbling to form in ranks. The Pennsylvanians, on a flanking charge through the orchard, came well into the fore. Glasgow, unable to run and cursing his fettering boot, saw himself left behind.

They were disciplined troops, those Hessians trying to break through the closing trap, but with officers befuddled and taken unawares. Muskets volleyed, cannon belched, charge was met by counter-charge, smoke eddied upon the gusts and swirled low in the damp air.

Continentals and militia closed the roads and lanes with ball and bayonet, matching tired legs and wet guns against the confused wits of the grenadiers. A troop of British dragoons galloped into open country and were off for the south, full pelt. Here and there a fugitive, afoot, labored into the edge of the orchard, as the Hessian ranks broke up.

Glasgow, his right leg all in a cramp of pain, gasped to a halt and leaned on his musket for rest. Suddenly his eyes focused, his heart pounded; he slid painfully to the nearest tree and waited, crouched.

A fugitive, in the clear, was coming for him at a tangent, running and limping through the orchard at lumbering gait, as though wounded. A big fellow—an officer, bareheaded, with rumpled yellow hair, and sword in hand. He ran, paused to hobble, broke again into a run. Glasgow threw up his musket. No use: the powder in the pan would not fire and he had not time to freshen the priming or betray the useless gun. With a hoarse shout, he leaped forth from his tree, to cut the Hessian's course.

The officer saw, heard, bounded aside, slipped in the ice, began to limp afresh. He spurted, then slackened anew, with Glasgow hobbling after him. He turned his red face, puckered in a snarl; finding Glasgow close upon him with ready bayonet, he jumped for the nearest tree and stood, heaving like a foundered horse, sword uplifted.

"Surrender!" Glasgow bore in, with panting voice. "Gimme them boots and that sword—Surrender!"

To his amazement, he met with no resistance. The yellow-haired Hessian was staring down at the ground—at Glasgow's boots. He pointed at them, blinked at Glasgow, and abruptly reversed his sword, handing it over hilt first. His burst of German was lost on Eben Glasgow, but his gestures were plain. So were the boots on his feet.

He wore two rights; his agonized expression, his limping, were explained.

The truth burst abruptly upon Eben Glasgow. Memory of two fuddled officers across a bed, one of them yellow-haired. This was the man! Rising to the alarm, snatching up two boots, and only two right boots remained!

The Hessian had sunk down; he was wrestling, cursing, fumbling, with his left boot, in which the foot was stuck fast. He looked up imploringly, he poured out a flood of German, and made urgent gestures, as he extended his left leg.

"Want me to play lackey, do you?" Eben Glasgow could scarce keep down his chuckle. "All right; looks like I've ketched me an officer with a sword, and the right boots after all. Remember you're a prisoner!"

He stowed musket and sword under one arm, hooked on to the extended boot, and hauled away. The Hessian slid on his rear end through the snow, stayed his slide, and the boot came off.

"Gott sei dankt!" In fervent relief, the officer sat up and began to rub his stockinged foot. Glasgow plumped down, warily tugged the torture boot from

his own right foot, and hauled on the gift boot.

"Thank Gawd!" he uttered, as he stood up.

The Hessian glanced at him, stared slack-jawed, then burst into guttural words. Glasgow tossed him the discarded boot, and he drew it on. A grunt, a sigh, and he came to his feet. He looked at Glasgow, and an enormous grin spread across his face; it was matched by the guffaw of the New Hampshire man.

Upon them dinned a great cheering, a wave of voices in exultant riot of delight. Eben Glasgow suddenly remembered the reckoning in store.

"Come on, march!" he ordered. "Turn around and march!"

THE Hession made no objection whatever. Glasgow herded him along with sword and bayonet and uselessly cocked gun. They won through the edge of the apple trees and so to the verge of town. Here troops were drawn up; Washington sat his horse, and a sword was being passed to him.

"*Rall! Lieber Gott!*" exclaimed the Hessian, pausing at the fence.

"Looks like we bagged the hull lot!" said Glasgow. "Over you go!"

Over he went, hoisting himself across the fence.

Glasgow, searching with wary eyes, perceived the New Hampshire Continentals, in double ranks, forming two sides of a square, into which arms were being dumped by filing Hessians. Watching the operation was Colonel John Stark.

Voices went up from the ranks; a stir, a cheer, a ripple of grinning jests. Bleakly searching the cause, Stark drew up stiffly when he found it, and eyed the approaching couple. Eben Glasgow grinned widely, to conceal his own fears.

"Hey, Colonel! Ketched you an officer with a sword, like you wanted! What'll I do with him?"

The nearby Hessians were exclaiming, pointing at the yellow-haired officer, who scowled as they uttered his name. Stark pursed his thin lips, in a brief study. His cold gaze lingered on Eben Glasgow's boots.

"Gun wouldn't fire," said Glasgow, losing his grin. "Had to chase him, Colonel, but I made him knuckle under!"

The chill face kindled.

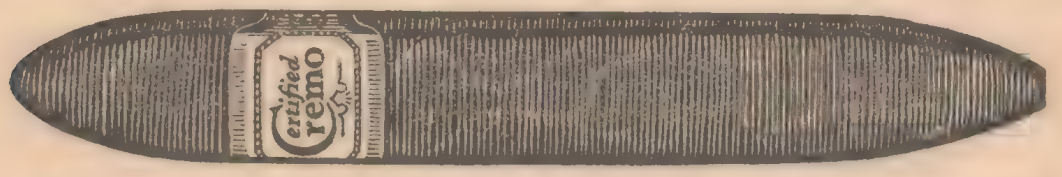
"Eben Glasgow—yes, I remember you. Waiting for your enlistment to run out, eh? Talking about going back home."

"Well, Colonel, my feet were mighty bad," said Glasgow shrewdly. "They feel better now. Guess I'll stick on to the end of the war. Maybe I'll get to be a corporal yet."

Colonel Stark eyed him, glanced at the boots, eyed him again, and turned away with a twitch of the lips.

"Maybe you will," he said. "Turn in your prisoner with the others and report where you belong, Corporal."

And Eben Glasgow, presently meeting the bulging gaze of Pardon James, replied to it with an elaborate wink.



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BLACKCOCK'S FEATHER

Fourth Part of Five

By MAURICE WALSH

THIS is the story of me, David Gordon, and it begins on the day I landed in Dublin Town in Ireland to search for my dead mother's kin.

Scotch-Irish as I was, I had no doubts as to which side to choose in the war between the English and the Irish, although Sir Francis Vaughan, from the court of Queen Elizabeth, had tried to enlist me into his invading army. I had no mind to do sword work for a queen who had sent Mary of Scotland to her death.

In Dublin I met Colum O'More and

Cathal O'Dwyer, two Irish fighting men, and saw Colum slain brutally and without cause by Captain Cosby of the Englishers. From that day my course was set. For I drew sword to avenge my friend, and only Vaughan's intervention let me escape the gallows.

As it happened, the long arm of Elizabeth reached out for me even as far away as the Ulster border, but I outrode Vaughan's horsemen to escape.

My next of kin, Donal O'Cahan, my cousin, was at Dungiven. With a true Irisher's stubbornness, he had managed to get himself bethrothed to the daughter of an Englisher who would have none of the match. So my first mission under Donal was to set that affair right. The lady was willing, so one dark night a handful of us took to saddle and caught the Englishers as they were taking the girl away. It was a good fight while it lasted, but when it was finished Donal had found himself a bride, and dead Englishmen sprawled on the dark Galway road.

It was every man for himself. We were many days' riding from our clan, deep into hostile territory, with every man's sword roused to slay us on sight. Donal made the wise decision that we should try to win through in scattered pairs, in order to attract less attention.

Father Senan, an old friar, was my companion on that wild dash for sanctuary, and in truth I had need of his prayers. For almost at the outset we found ourselves hemmed in by hostile horsemen, led by the infamous Captain Cosby, and escaped alive only by kidnaping Cosby's fiancée, stealing her boat and gaining the Corrib shore before the vengeful killer could find us.

Only when we reached land did I learn what we had done, and how it might be interpreted in that land of rumors and half truths. For the girl we had abducted was Eithne O'Flaherty, daughter of Queen's Captain Dame Bevinda O'Flaherty, one of the strongest neutral commanders in all Ireland, and we had landed in the very center of her province.

Eithne, angry as she was, held our lives in her hands that day. And for some reason she decided to be merciful. She directed us to a hunter's cabin deep in the Corrib forests, where we lay hidden until the hunt had died down.

Three weeks it took, and during that time I managed to learn a lot about that young lady. She was as beautiful as she was willful, and to me, who was no ladies' man, she paid almost daily visits. I was and am ugly, with no special graces, and I knew that she was pledged to another—a man I had sworn to kill. But as Father Senan and I took leave of that place, ready at last for the dash would take us back to Dungiven—or leave us hanged by some enemy highway—I knew that some day, if I lived, I would come back to claim her, and that she would not be unwilling.

CHAPTER XVII

HOMECOMING

IT WAS on a still, slumbrous afternoon that Senan and I rode up the glen to the brink of the ford below Dungiven. Our enduring small horses were spent and thin, and we draggled and weary. We had taken the full week on the hidden twisted road from Corrib, and most of the days and all of the nights had rained on us—a warm rain, but a wetting one.

That was the only discomfort that befell us. Our boots and cloaks were mired, our faces stubble-bearded, our eyes weary for undisturbed rest. My blackcock's tail was the only jaunty thing about us. And here at last was the haven of Dungiven; and Dungiven, that gray old dun, seemed a castle of the dead. No one moved about it, no one moved in the township on its flank. It lay there, slumbering and aloof in the haze of heat, and had no welcome for us. A great heaviness and lonesomeness came down on top of us.

"All of them," spoke up Senan bravely, "men, women, and children, will be down the riverland haymaking, and the garrison having a sleep to itself—same as Ferdoragh above."

Ferdoragh, guard of the gate, sat on his stone by the dark of the arch, his head down on his breast and his lean

shanks spread abroad. He did not hear our horses splash knee-deep across the ford; he did not hear the hooves on the causeway; our shadows were on him before he lifted his head, stumbled hastily to his feet, and blinked rapidly. His mouth opened and shut with a click.

"Great God!" he swore. "Is it ye?"

"It is," said the priest bitterly. "And why would not I be cutting your goat's head off with the sparth?"

"Holy Mother of God!" cried Ferdoragh, his eyes alight. "Is it not grand to hear you, and ye back to us again!"

"Are we the last?"

"And the long last. Ye are all home now. A house of the dead this was, instead of a wedding house—and the chief going about cursing a holy friar—and his lovely one at the weeping. Go on in, now, my darling fellows! Go on in, now, and 'tis I will let them know the great day is in it."

We rode under the gloom of the arch, and he yelled after us, "Horo! the wedding-feast, and it lasting till Lady's Day!"

And as we rode out into sunlight of the wide courtyard the great bell in the tower began to boom. Ferdoragh was leaping on the rope, and the brazen clang roared and roared.

That bell was only rung for a great feasting or a deadly alarm, and so it now waked the dun with a hum and a clamor. Out from the big living house, from the penthouses, from shady corners men came tumbling, half-naked and barefooted, grasping sparth or sword or spear—anything that had blow in it. And then they saw us, and the stark note of fierce alarm paused and broke queerly, and changed into the high and terrible note of the slogan. That high peal with the note of triumph in it made my hair stand up. And the thudding boom of the bell was inside my head.

AND all at once they came down on us in one mad rush, mouths open and arms tossing. Our horses reared in panic, and I was in a panic too and stared round me for a refuge. Between a notch of the parapets above I saw Donal Ballagh's head turned down on us, and a red crown, shining in the sun, was at his shoulder. I swung Benmee for the door of the tower, but next instant I was lifted bodily out of the saddle and whirled here and there about the bailey.

Great hands clapped me, strong arms clasped me, voices roared and laughed all around me. I saw old Turlough Mac-an-Teaclan with the tears running down on his white beard. Calvagh MacManus shouted in my ear: "Tomorrow we were out at the searching—I needed you." Tadg Ironhand, his mouth red in his black beard, roared heartily: "Now will my little one be happy."

Presently the press about us was shorn through impetuously and Donal Ballagh had an arm round each of us. His eyes were flaming in a white face, and he kept repeating, as if to himself, "Well—well—well!" Until, suddenly, he shouted, "Laggards! Laggards! Ye will pay for the fright on us."

My ribs bent under the crush of his grip, and I threw an arm across his shoulder. He was my own blood-cousin and we liked each other. I felt a tightness in my throat and my eyes stung.

The bell had stopped booming now and quiet came suddenly; I could feel the feet shuffling in the dust. The men made room about the three of us, and the lovely young wife, Amy, came through. Her blue eyes were swimming in tears as she smiled on us. She caught the old priest's hands and kissed them, and faced me, a quick shyness in her look.

"There she is for you," said Donal, shoving me forward. "Will you salute her?"

I tugged off my bonnet, bent knee, and lifted her fingers to my lips. And as I straightened up she placed her hands softly on my shoulders and kissed me on the rough cheek.

"You are welcome home, cousin," she whispered. "We were so unhappy."

My face flamed to her flush, and I could scarcely let her hand go. That was the finest of our welcome. But the welcoming was not yet over.

Donal was again holding us, and swung us towards the door of the keep.

"There are a couple of words to be

said," he threatened. "Come this way!"

At that old Turlough lifted his great voice.

"Justice!" he bawled. "The clan will have justice."

Donal turned to him. "Who withholds it, bellower?"

"I warn you, Donal Ballagh O'Cahan. There might be good telling in this, and the first of it is the clan's due. Ah! look at my old rogue and the gleam in his e"

"There is a tale, surely," said the priest, clearing throat in anticipation, "and if we had a bite and a sup . . ."

BEHOLD us, then, sitting at the long table in the mid-house and a mood of high feasting all round us. I sat between Donal and his queen, with Senan at her other side, and the board was weighty before us and all down its length. Those who would not reach the table ate and drank standing, and all the time the turmoil grew. For the boom of the bell had roused to hurry all who had heard it. Men—old and young—working in the fields, had grasped any weapon to hand and come in at the full stretch on pony or on foot; in couples and threes they streamed in, and, as they arrived, Ferdoragh shouted the news, and fresh cheers broke forth, and a fresh press of welcome came about us.

There was a lump in my throat and the meat choked me, but I took two deep gulps of Garonne wine, and that steadied me. Now I knew I was one of the clan, and that the coming home of Senan and me had put the great finish to a great adventure.

In truth our raid into Connacht was a notable affair and a marvel in all the north and west. Men would tell in wonder how O'Cahan and his cousin, with ten men, bearded one of the great Sassenach barons at his own door, broke his guard, stole his daughter, and twisted home through fifty leagues of raised country without losing a man.

All the fine lads who had been on that great ride made their own adventures and our warp and woof of the one saga, and they stood about us now, drinking great *methers* and talking and retalking of the exploits that were done, so that jumbled scraps of shouted words deafened me: "Hit the stallion on the nose and down the both went—No! not that way—backhand, same as you would flick a thistle—was I not behind, and a spatter blinded my eye?—sword in two halves—like a thistle-head, I tell you, and I kick it across the road—choking him he was till the chief stopped him—like a hare, and my spear held under his oxter—and two notches I made in it that night—in his cloak—and I heard the jawbone crack—and the girths broke, and he over the horse's tail—in a hop, step, and a jump, and they took the dun in the jump without seeing it—was I not behind him and the blood in my eye?"

Father Senan, done with eating, took a long draught of ale and cleared his throat loudly. At that signal silence settled down slowly, and here and there a man clapped hand over neighbor's open mouth. Feet shuffled, benches grated on the floor, and the clan settled itself to hear great story-telling. For the priest was indeed a great story-teller; though Turlough, with professional jealousy, would ever insist that he had a bad habit of certain ironic exaggeration. Not that Turlough himself was free from that fault, but his exaggerations were in the artistic grand manner.

Now, as I looked aside at the old bard I saw jealousy as well as interest in his eye; but as the tale unfolded the jealousy was ousted by the craftsman's admiration for craftsmanship. He held his hand-harp on his knee, and every now and then he would pluck a little run of notes and lean down to listen, and, every time, a tingle of coldness ran down my spine. Tomorrow or next day this Turlough would sing us a great lay and put our deeds in the memory of men as long as harping lasted.

"I am home now," began Senan artfully, "and I am glad of it, and though I set out on the sly and easy road, thinking to have the grand times to myself on the flank of danger, I blundered into the bottom of the net, pulled the meshes all round me, and gave David

Gordon the task of hauling me out again. Oh, ho! canny I was and cunning I was, and boasting to myself how I would head away from pursuit to Corrib side, skirt Moytura waste, make friends among the O'Kellys and O'Connors, and get to O'Donnell's border in easy and full-fed stages—bringing this poor young Albannach behind me and him praising me, head and belly. Aye! And all the time he saying to himself 'You old bag of bones! Home I will bring you in spite of yourself, the devil, and all the soldiers of Connacht!' And that he did, and every bone in the bag knows it. For look you, my children, sometimes he treated me like a bag of malt, and sometimes like a sea-pig in the water, and once or twice like a Christian man . . ."

AND so he set out to mold the mood of his listeners and deftly put contrast over against contrast. Thus he got the room tense with our alarm at Bellaghy, and brought the English horse to the very brink of the village as we galloped out at the other end, and then he had them all roaring at the pother I made about losing my fine linder.

When we did encounter the Sassenach we encountered them astoundingly in numbers and ferocity. Thundering down on us they were, with one man and two men and three men guarding every gap—and the man that faced us was like Finn or Cuchulain: a mighty warrior, wide as a door, on a gigantic horse, his head under his helmet like a black pot and his sword above the treetops. Poor Tom Pybus! And there was David Gordon, the little fellow, his blackcock's feather slanting in the wind and his legs twisted round his kittle mare's belly, and his sword like a wisp. And a big fellow fell to shake the mountains. . . . We were through, we were safe—and the Sassenach—all the garrison of Connacht—trailing after us.

He brought us to the torrent suddenly and had his listeners agape with the depth and rush of it; and forever the enemy coming down on us from the hill.

And there was that small jut of

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rock out of the foam at the grim last moment, and I in the air like a stag, and himself sousing and being emptied ignominously, and dragged and pushed and buffeted to safety up a brae that was a cliff, while the lead dunted the black stones.

He had us safe over the top at long last, and the gentle woman at my side sighed with relief. Ah! but it was then we were in the trap worse than ever, and no atom of hope for us in all the world. He made that sure. There were the three miles of Corrib on one hand and a mile-wide arm of it on the other, and we there in the bight with the Sassenach crossing the torrent behind us.

"Thunder of God!" swore Donal, feeling my arm. "But ye got out of it? Ye are here with us."

"We got out of it," said Senan quietly, "thanks to God and a lady—young and lovely as sloe blossom."

Amy turned her face to me, but, very carefully, I was not looking at her.

"Now we are the heart of it," cried Donal.

"And who the lady?" queried his wife.

And he told her.

"Eithne!" she cried, and grasped my arm. "My dear one!"

"And a long brute with her."

"Cosby of Cong?"

"The same."

"Did you kill him, David?" Donal leaned across to me.

"He did not," said the priest. "A shirt of mail saved him, but the dunt of the point flattened him on the edge of the water. But myself was cunning, for while this fellow was making himself polite I up and stole the boat."

"The boat?" The whole company seemed to shout the word.

"Surely. A boat painted white and green, and two oars in it. There we were meshed, and there was the boat, and there was the finger of God pointing. What else could I do but steal her?"

And he went on with his tale. When he described how I seized Eithne and dropped her in the bow like a pigling into a pannier for Derry Columcill Fair the lady clapped her hands. "That was how to take the little rogue! Go on, father!"

"That was the end of our troubles, my lady," he said. "Nothing could befall us after that." And no longer the fervid story-teller, he went quietly to the end, giving credit where credit was due, but never stressing the companionship between Eithne and me. A wise and thoughtful old hero.

At only one point did he warm again: when he came to the fishing with Garrodh. "A good man, Garrodh," he admitted, "and a true man, but about angling he holds notions I would give him penance for. His banded worm!—I showed him, did I not, David?"

"You did not," said I.

"What? And the trout I nourished you with!"

"I never want to see a trout again as long as I live," I told the whole table.

All the time the tale stayed in the Glen of the Echo I felt the lady's eye on me, and now and then her hand was laid gently on my arm. I drank draughts of red wine, kept my eyes on the table, and schooled my face to steadiness. But well I knew that this fine woman was already busy at surmises and conclusions, and that in the days to come I would have to bear with questionings framed to hide questions. Ah well! this was no longer a bachelor house, and we would have to pay for our chief's happiness.

CHAPTER XVIII

BATTLE SUMMONS

DONAL BALLAGH O'CAHAN, Amy his wife, and myself leaned on the ramparts of Dungiven and looked idly up the Glen of the Roe. The valley was a routh of greens and browns, and the thin, hot haze of autumn lay like a veil on the quiet face of it. The croon of the river came to us sleepily up the causeway; the warm air lulled us, heather-scented from the south; peace lay on the broad of the world; and there was no choice for a man but to be either happy or melancholic.

Donal and his lovely red-haired wife leaned close together, and I fear that I was the melancholic one. They were so happy—and I—well, I had small reason to be otherwise; but the hazed sunlight, the croon of the Roe, the stillness and the peace put their strange wistfulness on me and set my thoughts on far roads. I fear that I sighed. And Donal straightened up and laughed heartlessly at me.

"Surely," said he. "Connacht, and it far away!"

Amy looked across at me, and her woman's eyes were gentle.

"He is finding Dungiven lonely, I think," she said. "We are not the best of hosts, husband."

"Ye are not," I growled, "but ye are the best I can get."

It was a month since my return to the dun, and in that time this lady had squeezed me dry in her own gentle way, so that I was scarcely aware of it and thus did not resent it. Besides being a handsome wife, this red-haired lady was a wise one. She made no high-handed essay to change the habits of the dun, but she set out to make a pleasant domain of her own that would woo man and maid to it. The great bailey, with its penthouses and midhouse, she left alone for the present. These were the

men's quarters, and the men were grateful for not being disturbed. But at the west side of the dun, where there was a postern, she was already planning a terraced garden, and even now the masons were building the outer wall to it.

"If this war comes," she said, "it will keep the old men and myself busy, and ye will see green lawns and flowers and a lily pool where that packed clay is—and ye will learn to tread gently and doff bonnet and practice fine manners. And, David, do you know who will visit me there?"

"I do not," I lied.

"Eithne ni Flaherty, and—and, yes! I think I will offer her your heart."

"It is yours," said I, "and the only thing I have."

"My fine fellow!" cried Donal, who was listening. "Your mother's portion is yours, and maybe you will be noticing how our Uncle Conn over at Derry Columcill wants you to stay with him. He has two ships in the Spanish trade and no one for them. When will you try the merchanting?"

"When you kick me out."

"A small while yet. But all the same, we three will spend a week with him soon. I would like a ship myself."

"We cannot," said I. "There are twenty men here to learn the arquebus." This same Uncle Conn had brought us from Spain a score of a new pattern weapon with an improved lock, and I was busy training the men to it.

Up on the ramparts now I turned away from the lady's eyes, that had the power to bring the blood to my face, and looked along the white of the road.

"Look!" I said suddenly. "Mounted—"

Donal turned quickly, palm above his eyes, and stared intently down the valley road.

"From the O'Neill, think you?" he put me quietly, but his feet shifted restlessly.

"From some one—and that hurry on him."

Donal looked down at his wife, and she, seeing the trouble in his eyes, pressed close to him.

"Not yet," she whispered, half to herself. "The truce still holds."

We leaned over the ramparts and watched the rider, a saffron-clad kern with spear slung and heels in his horse's flanks. He was pressing his mount cruelly, and would be at the ford in half a minute. Already we could hear the thud of unshod hooves and see the blurred shadows flit on the sun-baked road.

"He might be from O'Donnell," said I, and felt a pulse beat. For a messenger from O'Donnell, riding in haste, might mean a campaign Corrib way—and more besides.

The rider splashed across the ford, and there came faintly the high challenge of Ferdoragh.

"We will wait here," said Donal quietly, holding his wife's arm. She gazed at him, and he smiled down at her. A steadfast man when the pinch came.

We had not long to wait. In a minute, strangely drawn out, he heard a shuffling on the stone stairs, and the red head of Calvagh MacManus rose into the frame of the turret doorway.

"Rider from O'Donnell," he shouted at once, excitement in his voice; and my heart gave one dunt.

THE kern stumbled into the light and swayed on his feet. He was covered with dust; even his black glib was powdered white; and his face was gray and haggard.

Behind him came old Father Senan, puffing after the long spiral.

"O'Cahan?" inquired the man hoarsely, blinking from one to the other of us.

"At your service, a friend," said Donal.

The kern saluted and cleared his throat, and Donal looked with reprimand at his foster-brother.

"He would take nothing till he said his word to you," Calvagh excused himself.

The man wetted his cracked lips with his tongue and began the speech that he must have committed to memory on the weary road. "Hugh Roe O'Donnell sends brother's greeting to O'Cahan and seeks his help."

"The Sassenach?"

"The Sassenach—a red wind blast them! Listen, chief. This is what I am to say: The great fighting man, Sir Conyers Clifford, with the loyalist dogs of Clanricard and O'Connor Roe, two nights ago came down on the fords of the Saimhor and tried to storm the dun of Bellashanny. They failed that time, but are in a ring around it, and Hugh Roe O'Donnell is gathering help from the four winds."

"Hugh Roe used to be strong enough to guard his own borders," growled Calvagh.

The kern stiffened. "Hugh Roe can do more than that, as the world knows, but Clifford, the wily one, picked his time well—when the clans were in shieling and the dun with a bare garrison. Thirty standards of foot, ten squadrons of horse, a ship from Galway with engines landed to batter down the walls—and over against them in the dun a handful of Scots soldiers under Hugh Crawford out of Scotland. Chief, I was bid say to you that this is no small foray. If Clifford wins Bellashanny he holds one gap of the north, and O'Cahan is no safer than O'Donnell. Hugh Roe asks your help. That is my word." He threw out his hands in a sudden sharp gesture and pulled himself up to hear the answer. And he got that answer on his last word.

"O'Donnell shall have O'Cahan's help," said Donal quietly.

"That was known, great O'Cahan," cried the messenger, and suddenly went limp. He staggered, and Calvagh put a holding hand on him.

"See to him, brother," ordered Donal. "He is of the true breed."

Calvagh and the O'Donnell clansman disappeared down the dark curve of the stairs, and we stood silent, listening to the shuffle of the feet on the stones. The young wife turned her head aside from her husband and looked across the ramparts of the brown side of the glen beyond the river.

Donal did not look at her. He stood up very straight and held her arm firmly within his.

"It is on us—the big blow," he said, "and we must look to our plans."

"Your plans are made," said the priest.

"We have but decided to send help to Bellashanny. This is only the beginning. Remember O'Neill's warning? De Burgh, Kildare, and the Pale will come down full force on Dungannon, and there the full brunt will be. That is what we must prepare for."

"Then your place is here," said Father Senan.

"Well?"

"The thing to do is the thing I see in your mind."

"And it?"

"Send all the horse you can spare to Bellashanny—with a good man to lead them."

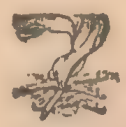
"And who would that man be, I am wondering?" Donal smiled, his eye away from me.

"There is a middling good man that I have in mind," said Senan.

The two laughed, but I saw nothing to laugh at in this serious business. I turned sullenly enough to Donal, and he clapped me on the shoulder. "David, brother! Your two score horse must be at the Saimhor tomorrow before nightfall. You lead, with Calvagh as your second. What are you standing there for and time pressing?"

I heard Amy's sigh of relief. Here was respite—and de Burgh might never strike.

Alas! In a week Dungannon became an armed camp with all roads leading to it. But sure, an hour gained is precious to lovers.



THAT was a strenuous ride through a wild and lonely land. Our road led us across vast moors, purple with heather, where the pilibeen flapped, calling wearily, and the gray plover piped plaintively along the slopes; by black tarns where bog-lilies floated and dry reeds shivered in the wind; down into quiet valleys where small streams gurgled and corn patches yellowed in the sun; and up long stone-ribbed braes grown with yellow whins, that crackled in the autumn heat and breathed their mystic odor into the air.

The haze of the fall was over all the

He was pressing his mount cruelly, and would be at the ford in half a minute.

land; there was a stale feel in the keening wind; high in a pale sky the yellow-tinged clouds drifted sluggishly. It was like riding through the land of a dream. Ride an hour in it and you had ridden a year, and so might ride forevermore.

And it was a land emptied of men. In the cornfields women bent to the hook and stooked the sheaves; in the wattled townships women came to the doors and watched us out of calm eyes; in the upland shielings women herded the black kine. They spoke little to us riding through. Quiet they were as their own hills, patient as their dumb earth.

"Bring our men home to us," cried one young one. "Laggards, laggards!" taunted an old hag.

But surely we did not tarry on that road. Our first night's camp was in a pine wood near a hamlet with a stone dun, where the women brought us oatcakes and curds, and an ancient storyteller, fighting done, hobbled to our fire and gabbled of old raids into Tyrowen in the days of Shane. Before the fall of the second night we had reached the Saimhor.

The wind, blowing to us, brought the hum of the siege long before we sighted it, and told us that we were still in time. Every four or five minutes the deep thunder of the culverins shook the air, and in between a rattle of arquebus crackled and spat. And at last, topping a slope, we saw the dust and smoke lift and roll, and yonder across a mile of plain was the stubborn dun of Bellashanny standing above the Falls of Assaroe. It was dim in the pother of

dust, and to the right smoke rolled up where the culverins thundered on the breast of a round hill. On that hill we could distinguish the straggling lines of an entrenched camp, and on the plain below a yet larger camp—a huge camp this, curving from the river and ringing hill and dun. The Saimhor lay below us like a carelessly dropped ribbon, with wimpled stretches where the fords were, and at each ford were armed men.

"Let us down to it," cried Calvagh eagerly, at my side.

"Down with us, then! Twos, in good order."

But we were already late for any of that day's merry work. The fight sallies were dying with the sun and the culverins were now silent, while the smoke cloud slowly lifted and rolled away.

We rode straight for the camp, keeping the curve of the river on our left and making a string to its bow. Midway on the string the guards at one of the fords saw our array, and a single horseman galloped across to us.

"Young Maguire," shouted Calvagh, riding up from the rear. "See the yellow mane to him."

It was, indeed, Doncadh Donn Maguire, my gay lad of Dungannon: bareheaded, with a hawk's feather in his splendid hair and a black corslet carelessly buckled at the shoulders. At first he did not know me.

"Ye come late," he shouted. "From where?"

"Dungiven," I called back.

"O'Cahan's lads! Ah! and is it David Gordon, by the High Powers? Black cock's Feather! Oh-ho for it! And there is Calvagh himself." He galloped and swerved to my side, eye and hand welcoming. "And where is Donal Ballagh?" he inquired.

"Waiting the word from O'Neill."

"Same as my father. Once on a day Donal could not be held from a rally like this."

"Two-score of his best here," said Calvagh.

"To be sure! It could be that a newwed man has small stomach for blows. My choice! but yon was a great play ye made in Connacht, David Gordon. Why did ye not call for me after ye crossed Erne? Is it true that you knocked off the head of Langdon Coote, the swordsman, with a blow of the basket?"

"It is not."

"It is said, and he is a dead man anyway. You will be wanting to report to Hugh Roe?"

"If we find him."

"My camp is yonder by the ford, and an ox roasting. Send your men across. They know my lads—they were all at Clontibret together. I know where O'Donnell has his quarters near the Abbey, and we two will ride over to him."

It would have suited me fine to ride up to Red Hugh, forty trained men at my back, but here was the wise and kindly word, so I swallowed my vanity and gave Calvagh his orders.

Maguire and I backed away and watched the men swing off in rank. "Work you put into them heroes," he commended. "Let us on."

"FINE talker," said I, "have you any word of this siege?"

"A hundred thousand! Faith! there are two sieges and hot as hell on Easter Monday: the Sassenach at the dun, and we at the Sassenach. Clifford, the fox, in a trap of his own setting! Friday in the night he sallied up from Sligo, surprised the fords at the dawn, and hoped to surprise the dun. But my bold Crawford, Hugh the Albannach—you met him at Dungannon—jerked the drawbridge in his face and settled down like a badger. So siege it had to be—or retreat, and tough Clifford took his chance. He planned the game as neat as a bout of chess, but foolish to make plans and forget how Hugh Roe O'Donnell might tumble the board. And that is what Hugh did. No waiting to marshal the clan, he swooped down with the men he had handy, beaconed all the hills from here to Innisowen, struck here and struck there like a flash, and struck harder as his strength grew. In tens and twenties came his clan, angry as the red bees, and from over the border the Maguires, the O'Ruarcs—and now yourself. By noon, Monday, he had forty companies on the Sassenach flanks, and yon is how we have them now."

He gestured widely from river to castle, and I envied him his fine roll of words.

"On Saturday the Sassenach held all the fords as far as Devinish, now he holds only one—the Path-of-the-Heroes above the falls, and he has a collar-and-elbow grip on that, his only road. My lads behind won the ford we hold—a bonny fight—to our bellies in water and hitting overhand, and when a man went under he stayed under. Tomorrow, and God is good, we will put the Sassenach in the trap and the forked stick down. The Sassenach! Aye, and all the royalist dogs of Connacht—O'Connor Roe, Clanricard, and his son Rickard the Sassenach. Is it true you cut out Rickard's tongue?"

"It is not. Can Crawford hold the dun?"

"That fellow! Tough Hugh! with eighty Scots bonnachts and ten days' food! That badger will not be drawn.—We turn right here—Hugh Roe will be down by the Abbey."

The sun was behind the high square tower of the dun, that stood out black and sharp against a warm sky. The smoke had blown away, the rival camps had ceased their worrying, and instead of gun peal and slogan, a great and peaceful hum rose from plain and hill. The Irish camp that we skirted was a medley of hastily-erected shelters, and it was as full and busy as a hive. Here and there fanned fires began to flame cheerily, little spirals of smoke twisted, and groups of men were busy round the cooking-pits.

"A hard and merry day," said Maguire. "That smell makes me hungry. Let us hurry. Siege and counter, attack and sortie, skirmish of horse and struggle of pike—from dawn to dusk. We were not strong enough to carry their trenches by open assault, and the dun defiled them in spite of all their arts. They battered at it with their culverin, tried to set a mine in the arch, made essay to bridge the moat! Blazes! but you should have seen the mailed fellows tumble in the ditch when Crawford set their wooden tower afire. Yon, now, are O'Donnell's quarters."

We had swung round the north edge of the camp to where the Abbey of Assaroe looked across at Innis Saimhor. Between the abbey and the island we could see the clean green of the sea, golden tracked by the sun, with an anchored ship swinging black against the gold.

"There is Hugh himself," said Maguire. "The young lad with the red hair."

O'DONNELL'S quarters were in the stone guest house of the abbey, but the young eagle stayed outside in the open air. With the two notable chiefs named, he sat on a bench before the door, looking out along the track of the sun. Our approach made him turn his head, and, seeing us, he lifted to his feet.

I looked at him with interest, for this man's fame was overseas. I knew he was not old in years, but I had expected him to be war-hardened and grim. And he was only a lad: a young, lithe, swank lad with finely-red hair, a delicately smooth face, and gray, wide-set eyes. He looked at me, and then I knew the force that was in him.

For his eyes had the hooded-eagle set under the wide brow, and he had a way of leaning forward from the hips like an eagle ready to swoop—and aye ready was he.

"Is it you, Donn?" he called, high and clear. "Keep you a tight grip yonder?"

"A double hold, Hugh, with forty men just in from O'Cahan. This is Donal's cousin, David Gordon, who leads."

O'Donnell looked at me with quick interest.

"You are welcome, David Gordon," he said. "Your name is known. My mother—God rest her—was a Scot too."

"A sword hand to him, by all accounts," said Gallagher, who had remained seated, one knee across the other.

"Horse or foot?" inquired O'Donnell.

"Horse, O'Donnell," I replied.

"Drilled me, too," amplified Maguire. "Half of them with the flint-lock."

The young leader's eye lit up, and it was only when they lit that one knew

how the Gaelic gloom lay behind them. "Horse we need. You will camp with Maguire for the night. Tomorrow the fight will be for the Path-of-the-Heroes, and your horse will have good share in it. Luck with ye."

"Were I trapped like yon," rumbled the heavy voice of the black MacSwyne, "I know what I would do."

"So do I," mocked the small leader of the gallow-glasses, "and it would be the wrong thing."

"Would it so?"

"It would, for out you would be sallying with your big hired axes—and we would bury you with your head under your oxter. Now, I know what I would do."

"What would you do?" inquired O'Donnell with interest.

"I would dare the Falls of Assaroe in the dark, and make a bid for Sligo walls."

"In the dark across Assaroe?"

"I would so," said O'Gallagher, and there was a hard daring in his eyes that did not belie him.

"Conyers Clifford is a good man too," said O'Donnell musingly. And then he shrugged his shoulders. "Ah well! we must wait the morrow."

WE rode back to the river by the skirt of the camp, where the fires were now bright and the men at food, and splashed across the ford to where our men were settled amidst clumps of willows. My lads were already at home amongst the clansmen of Maguire, and as noisy around the cooking fires as the owners of them. There was talk and laughter everywhere, as was the way of these Irish fighting men.

With Calvagh and Tadg Ironhand I looked over the horses. They had been watered and well picketed amongst the willows, and the men had found a trampled cornfield and had cut the heads off the ripe corn for a fine pile of forage. And then Donn Maguire, Calvagh, and I sat on our cloaks by the brink of the Saimhor, ate roast ox, and talked of the morrow.

Twilight was darkening round us, the camp-fires, far and wide, twinkled brighter, a drone as of bees drifted with the lazy air; behind us a gallowglass laughed, at our feet the river gurgled. Overhead the sky was high and deep, with little gray cloud islands floating amongst the faint stars; a great peace folded us in; we seemed to be far and far removed from war and death; we stopped talking of battle and its chances. Then the day's long ride came home to me and I yawned.

"Blast me!" swore Donn Maguire, "I forgot. Let us be taking a fine sleep to ourselves, in the name of God."

I pulled my new mail-shirt over my head and lay on my back, folded in war-cloak, but sleep did not come to me for yet a while. I stared into the deepening blue between the stars and thought of many things. Now at last was I soldier and leading my squadron of horse, and men, who were good men, talked of me as Blackcock's Feather. And Advent was still two months distant, and luck coming my way. For with the Sassenach and the loyalists trapped on the Saimhor, Connacht was open to us, and the great O'Donnell would not hesitate in sweeping it from end to end. And what then? And what then? Queen's Captain Bevinda O'Flaherty, who could bite hard in her own cause, might be careful with a man who could bite and had bitten. And Eithne? the kind one who had looked at me out of the deeps of her eyes . . . And who would be lonely—lonely . . . And so I drifted into sleep and dreamt of dark curls on a white brow—but I could not see her eyes.

CHAPTER XIX

NO QUARTER

MY awakening was desperately rude. A hand gripped my shoulder and bit, and Donn Maguire's voice shouted in my ear. "Gordon! David! The fight is on."

I shook my head, and looked towards the dun. Down there red flashes cut across the dark, arquebuses cracked, fierce yells rang through the night.

"A sally on the camp," cried Ma-

guire, and at that O'Gallagher's words came to me.

"The Ford of Assaroe!" I exclaimed.

"Never the Path-of-the-Heroes in the dark?"

Calvagh was at my shoulder.

"Let us get the men horsed," he bellowed in my ear.

There followed a nerve-dragging time of blind feeling for straps and buckles, of the shouting and movement of men, the tugging and rearing of startled horses, and a scrambling and pushing into some kind of order. When at last, with shirt of mail settled on my shoulders and sword in hand, I sat on Benmee a-quiver at Maguire's side, facing the ford, I drew a long breath of relief. The horse were arrayed behind us in double line, and the gallowglasses crouched, fully armed, amongst the sallies at either hand.

The night had changed while we slept. A clouded sky hung over us; big drops of rain spattered now and then on my mailed shoulders; the air was thick and hot. Yet the night was not dead black, for, somewhere southwards, the moonlight suffused grayly through the cloud-pall and showed us the waters wimpling with uncanny gurglings down the ford.

"A finger for a blink of light!" cried Maguire. "It is hotter down below."

It was, though the arquebuses no longer crackled. Steel clanged, men shouted—the night was in travail. And we at the ford, not knowing what to do, waited for the birth. We had not long to wait. A horseman came clattering out of the dark and racketed to a standstill at the edge of the water.

"Dogs! Dogs!" he yelled. "Are ye up?"

"Who rides?" thundered Maguire.

"O'Donnell's word. To the ford—to Assaroe." Frenzy must be swaying him in the saddle. "The Sassenach are crossing. Down on them and hold them till the clan clusters. Up with ye!" He swerved his horse away and was gone up the river towards the fords of Devenish.

"It is so, then, David Gordon," said Donn Maguire, suddenly calm. "Let us down and push them over Assaroe."

The gallowglasses came breaking through the sallies. I maneuvered my men out into the open, behind the clumps, and, with Calvagh and Tadg keeping touch on the wings, we pricked forward on that desperate venture.

The English, without doubt, were making good their escape from the trap. Sir Conyers Clifford, hardy man of war, was playing dice with death—a bold game, boldly played. North side of Saimhor was failure and death, south of it the bare chance of getting his force behind the distant walls of Sligo. And he took that chance to save his men and his province. Leaving guns and stores as spoil, he, in the heart of the night, marshaled his men down to Assaroe, and, squadron by squadron, marched them shoulder-locked through the rush of waters above the falls—the Ford-of-the-Heroes, and every man a hero that night. Behind their leaders, O'Connor Roe, Clanricard, Dunkellin, Vaughan, Cosby, Wingfield, they marched in good order, and if, here and there, a man lost his feet, the thunder of the falls drowned his last cry. Half, two-thirds were safe across, when a Scots sentinel on an outwork of the dun caught the glimmer of moving steel in a vanishing ray of moonlight, and guessed its import. His alarm roused the garrison, who lit a bonfire on the ramparts and themselves sallied out, firing their arquebuses.

O'Donnell, roused out of sleep, did all he could, but he could never hope to array his wide-flung clan in time to bring the enemy to bay. The more fight-lusty of his men, half naked from their sleep, grasped sparth and spear, and came yelling their slogans on the English rear. But they came too late, charging on a stubborn rearguard, all steel and buff, that took minutes to die and gave the main force time to marshal its columns on the left bank and begin its orderly retreat. O'Donnell's men, dammed back by that stubborn rearguard, flowed upstream to the next ford, and with this scattered body of gallowglasses intermingled as they blundered along in the dark. Calvagh, Tadg, and I kept our lads out on the flank of this jumble.

I HAVE never met any man who could tell clearly the story of that night. All that any man can say is that there never was the like of that running fight from Saimhor to the gates of Sligo. It was one long drawn-out rallying and worrying of maddened men in the dark.

The English foot kept in close column, hugging the sea; the English horse, split into squadrons, flickered around it, front and rear. They were fighting for life, and no better fight was ever made. Time and again the clans, half-naked, gathered force and stormed down on that massive column; time and again they were met doggedly by hedge of steel; time and again a squadron of horses stemmed those yelling rushes, were surrounded as with a flood, and drove a way through—a remnant, captain and trooper knee to knee. Men died, and dying, were trampled under foot; riderless horses bucketed out of the press; yells of hate and rage, triumph and challenge, rent the night; steel rang on steel, thudded dully on buff, went silent through warm flesh. But that iron column, rallying and mending its rents, held doggedly on its way.

And down above that trailing fight was the gloom of the low sky and the rain drumming in off the gray sea. Here were cliffs, dropping sheer and black to the restless lift of the waves, and here were long wet strands with the tide creeping and a stain on the edge of it; and at long last came the pale dawn stealing, and over there in the distance were the towered walls of Sligo.

I, who led them, will say that my forty men did their share that night. My post as leader steadied me, and, until the very end, I was not concerned with my own part in the fight. Once I mind a pike dunting on my mailed shirt and nearly lifting me out of the saddle; once I was in a staggering mêlée on the brow of a cliff and heard the waves boom between the shouts; and once I exchanged blows with a halberdier knee-deep in the tide. But my whole mind was bent on nursing and still nursing my troop, and using it cannily where we had a chance to do our share. No foolish attempt did we make to stem a charge of the heavy Sassenach horse. Twice, indeed, we charged on a broken remnant and emptied many a saddle, but mostly we skirmished across the front of the column on our light and hardy horses and tried to retard the retreat. Time and again, avoiding the full charge, we swooped out of the dark slantwise at the head of the column, forced it to set itself in a pike-hedge, and swept by just outside the points. When the final rally came I still had thirty men behind me, but by then our horses could hardly raise a trot. Calvagh was still with me, but Tadg had been dismounted somewhere in the dark.

Dawn came and saw us surging against the walls of Sligo. We had failed to hold or break the enemy. His dead were strewn along the coast, his horse were only a remnant, but still he faced us as stubborn as ever. And Sligo was now ready to receive and save him—and save Connacht.

It has been argued that if Sligo had been a mile farther away none of the English force would have escaped. It could well be.

O'Donnell's men, scattered from Devenish to the sea, had not been ready for a night attack, and, eagle though Hugo Roe was, he necessarily took a long time to get his heavy-armed gallowglasses into action. All night long, away in the rear, he had been mustering his scattered men and sending them forward, but it was only now in the dawn that he, with his main force, came down on the English flank. He was too late. With Sligo walls in front he had no room to swing forward and cut the enemy off. But, even so, he very nearly succeeded in winning Sligo.

The east port was open; the portcullis had creaked up; the head of the Sassenach column was pressing through the arch, when O'Donnell made his last desperate effort.

And this time my men charged home with the clans. The remnant of Clifford's horse tried to stem us, but we flooded round them and, one by one, they were dragged down to death. And there too—sad day!—I lost my great

mare, Benmee. A big pikeman, teeth a-grin, thrust her through the breast, and she sank under me. If my feet had been in stirrup nothing could have saved me. As I was falling forward under the pike of the soldier, a fierce grip pulled me to my feet, and there was the great foam-flecked beard of Tadg Ironhand at my shoulder. At once the press was round us, and we were only two units in the storm.

We bore down, shoulder-linked, on the Sassenach rear and drove in with it to the gate. The rear broke, and we intermingled with it, still driving forward. That was a tense minute—Eiranach and Sassenach in one swaying mass—hacking sideways and yelling into each other's faces. We reached the gateway. Nothing could stay us. Already a score or more of us were in the gloom of the archway—and then!—Then the portcullis clanked down, pinned a halberdier as if he were a fly, and snapped that press of men in two. Half a standard of Sassenachs were left to die without, and our score were trapped in the arch.

I was one of that score.

A MINUTE ago I was one of four thousand harrying a beaten enemy, now I was one of a score trapped and doomed. For yet a minute I did not realize it. Then, above the din, a voice cried in my ear, "We are in it now." It was Calvagh MacManus at my shoulder.

"And hard dying," boomed a voice at my other shoulder, and there was the flaring beard and blood-shot eyes of Tadg Ironhand.

And as I twisted head to look back at the massive grill of the portcullis there was Doncadh Donn Maguire, his back against the bars, his golden hair atoss and his eyes gleaming. Why not? We four had been in the front of that last charge, and we were big enough and strong enough to keep our places.

"Let us kill," roared a big gallowglass of the Maguires, his voice high above the worrying of the clans dammed against the portcullis.

But there was little space there to kill or be killed. Our score, mostly together, faced inward. What few of the enemy were amongst us were already dead and held upright only by the pressure. I stood breast to breast with a tall halberdier, whose weapon was broken above the ax, and by the grin in his teeth I knew he was the man that had killed Benmee.

"Dog!" he cried into my face. "If I had a hand free—"

With a sudden side-thrust of the shoulder he made an inch of room and jerked his halberd arm out of the crush. "I have you now." But at that a look of shocked surprise came into his face and his lifted weapon fell behind his shoulder. "You've done for me," he whispered, and his face twisted.

It was Tadg. At the small of my waist he had driven his great hand forward, and his sgian had gone home.

It was not pleasant to see the man die. I strained back and let him slip to the ground, and his room gave my sword-arm room—"Let us die in the open."

And we had our way. For the first time that night the English broke before us. They were safe within their walls and, now, they did not want to die. They turned and strove inwards, and we drove them. And when they reached the open they did not at once wheel round on us, but scurried away right and left, and gave us an open space below the big gate-tower. In a little time they would rally and turn, and then the end would not be long. That great cobbled space was crowded with men, and beyond them was a street of wooden-joisted houses running down hill into a gray sky behind the gray roofs.

But we did not die just yet. We were a panting clump of men just outside the arch, and, suddenly, Doncadh Donn Maguire, with a great shout, whirled me round.

"Look!" he cried.

The tower, north of the gate, was buttressed by a dozen stone steps, and at the head of the steps was a wide-open door. No doubt the tower was garrisoned and the portcullis room full of soldiers, but here was a chance we could not lose.

"Up! Up! Up with ye!" roared Maguire, bundling the nearest man forward.

"Let me die in the open, chief," prayed desperately one of his own gallowglasses.

"Like a wolf? Be badger now, Ulric, and sell your life dearly."

As we made for the steps the nerve of the Sassenach returned. A yelp, as from a pack, and their long front surged on us.

"Steady, brothers, steady!" It was Calvagh, cool as at drill. "Two at a time, and we are all in."

At the head of the steps Donn and I turned at bay. Leaping at the head of the English was a big fellow in fluted half-armor, a bloody sword in his hand. Here, now, was a man that I must kill. Back through the night my arm had ached from gripping hilt, but now I felt no ache as I brought blade up and went down a step.

"Here is the weapon for him," cried Donn. "Leave him to me."

Maguire had broken his sword sometime in the night and was now armed with the long-handled ax—the terrible weapon of the gallowglass. He made no pother at all about this killing. The big fellow came leaping up at us.

"Have at you!" he cried. And Donn swung his ax. That was all. It shore through guard, dunted on steel morion, and the big fellow crumpled and rolled down under the feet of his men.

Donn yelled clear and high, threw up his ax, and next moment I had him by the belt and through the doorway. Calvagh banged the door shut, and Tadg shot the big bar into its slot as the weight from outside burst against it. The tough oak strained and held.

"That was a clout I hit," shouted Donn happily.

THE room we were in was the main guardroom, but we did not pause to examine it. Every man there had only one thought—the portcullis chamber above our heads. If we could win that before the walls of Sligo were manned and lift the portcullis, Sligo might still be ours. The men were already at the turret stairs and crushing upwards on each other's heels. There was no hanging back for these fine fellows in that crisis of death.

And alas! death it was. Maguire and I were not halfway up the dark curve of the stairs before the fight broke out above us. The portcullis chamber was fully manned, and here was our last fight.

It was a great window-slitted chamber, covering the whole floor of the tower, and there was plenty of sword room. The heavy top-bar of the portcullis stood six inches out of the floor, and there was the heart of the fight. Though the guard outnumbered us, our first charge swept them across the room, and Calvagh got the holding-pin free and two men in the chains before they rallied and charged back. And this time reenforcements came pouring in to them. For another stair led up from the south tower, and by this the soldiers came and came and came.

It was about that time that I let the grip on myself go. All the night long I had been the careful and anxious leader of my bonny troop of horse, and at no time had the lust of battle swept me. Now I was to die, and, from somewhere, it came suddenly to me that never had I fought care-free. By Heaven, I would try myself out now, knowing it to be the last chance.

I was no rat in a trap. I was not sorry for myself. I surely was not unhappy. If I could describe my feeling at all I would call it exultation. I was no longer the silent, dour Scot. I laughed, I rallied the men cheerfully, I shouted the sword-song of Gillian the Black:

I am the Sword—hammered and wrought
By Gillian, for Gillian.
Where, now, the swank men, lean men who fought
By Gillian, for Gillian?
Dust in the wind, clay in the rain,
Like Gillian. Ho! Gillian!
Still am I clean, blade without stain—
Dead Gillian, dust Gillian!"

That spiral stairway was made for defense.

I was mightily pleased with myself. And oh! but I was deadly. I was tall, with great shoulders and strong wrist, and I moved lightly on long legs. I used the point mostly, and I knew that my father, in the face of God, would not call me clumsy. No man could withstand me that day. The power came from somewhere inside myself. Men faced me and parried, and I drove right through them. I raged in a fine gayety across the floor and back, and the men followed and died round me—but the end was certain.

THERE we were, now, at the foot of the next flight of the turret stairs—all that was left of us. There was a drift of hot steam in the room and the flagged floor was slippery. Donn Maguire was there, unwounded, though the corselet was torn from his shoulders; there was the rug-headed, big gallowglass called Ulic, covered with blood not his own; Calvagh MacManus, bleeding at neck and shoulder; and Tadg Ironhand, leaning against the lintel, blood running down his great hairy thigh.

"Up to the next floor," I roared. "We can hold them there. On, Maguire!"

Ulic and Maguire disappeared backwards, Calvagh and I were shoulder to shoulder in front of Tadg. And then a man in front of us—no Sassenach, but a traitor gallowglass of Clanricard—dropped suddenly on one knee and got home with his sgian below Calvagh's guard, "Done, now," he cried, and fell.

The killer lifted his head close below me, and I smashed it savagely flat with my hilt. A pikeman, about to dash in, flinched back, and I was in the doorway.

Tadg was at my side, leaning on the jamb. Fiercely I cursed him for tarrying. "Hamstrung!" he cried in my ear.

"To my shoulder!" And, still facing forward, I succeeded in hitching him to the first tread of the stairs.

Then Maguire's voice came from above. "I have him," and the big fellow's weight was lifted off me. It was time.

A small lithe fellow in officer's armor was facing me, and he was a swordsman—better than I was, now that I was driven to defense. The pikeman was trying to edge in at his shoulder and the sworder snarled at him, and, as he snarled, my blade scored his neck. He came at me again, and, as I took the second tread of the stairs, his point pinged upon my mail-coat. And then I had him at vantage. That spiral stairway was made for defense, since it forced the attacker to use his left hand. He saw that I was escaping him, and showed a fatal hardihood. He sprang inwards to the foot of the stairs and tried me with the upward lunge to the groin. I swerved away round the corbel, his blade searing my hip-bone, and then countered him overhand above the gorget. He staggered, and fell clear of the doorway, but no other took his place. The game was too desperate.

Maguire and big Ulic supported Tadg at the head of the stairs. We were in a low-arched sleeping-room with a four-poster bed in one corner and tapestries on the wall. Through the window slit I caught a glimpse of a hill far away, and the young sun made a glow behind it. It seemed a glimpse of another world.

"Us against all hell," said Donn, gay to the end. "Is it not the pity of the world that no one will be left to tell the things were done in this tower?"

"Dhia!" said the big gallowglass huskily, "I could drink Loch Erne dry."

And there was the chink in our armor.

Tadg Ironhand was my man, and I took him in my arms across the couch, while the others watched the stairs. He had a clean cut slantwise across the thigh, and I tried to stanch the bleeding. There is one thing that every clansman takes to war: a pouch of dry moss—the same healing moss that the great Dalcassians used to stanch their wounds that time they fought their way home from Clontarf. I applied a great pad of this, and bound it with strips torn from the couch covering.

"Small use now," he whispered, and as I bent over him he touched my shoulder with his great hand.

"You led us well, a Gordon!" he said. "We were your children. The clan will know." And after a pause: "Pity this is the end for you."

"Not yet, brother," said I.

"No. It would be fine to die under the sky." He turned his head to where the light came through the window slit.

"We will do that," I told him.

Again I took him in my arms, and went across to where a curtain hid the last upflight of stone steps. "Let us to the open," I called to Donn, leaning like a cat at the stair head.

"That will be best," he agreed, after a pause.

"This is the place for me while I have a tooth left," said big Ulic.

"Stay and kill, then," said Donn, his big hand against my back on the stairs.

UP ON the battlements we drew clean breath once more. I laid Tadg down in a corner by the turret tower and straightened up. The smooth flags of the roof spread before us a score of paces—a square floor shut in with notched parapets and roofed by the sky—and the clean wind of morning blew across it and stirred life in us afresh.

With Donn I leaned against the open door, looking down into the gloom of

the twisted stair. Down there, where had been so much turmoil, was no sound at all now. No sound at all for a long time, and then a great voice roared, "Here is for you, dead man."

The thunderous bang of a petronel shut on the last word, and the crash of a fall followed. Then came a sudden clamor, and a voice of authority broke out above it. "Back! Back! Some are still above." Ensued a scuffling and growling, and clank of arms against stone.

"And there went Ulic Mor," said Donn. "Our turn now."

I was glutted with fight, and a great weariness of life came to me. Without a word I turned and strode across to the parapet, leaned breast on it, and looked down and away.

In the distance were the fine sheen of water and the bulk of hills, dark with woods, where a trail of cloud floated. A fresh autumn morning for one not sodden with death! I looked away from it to the plain below, and there were the clans drawing off from the fight. They were in complete disarray, and mounted men galloped across their rear, urging them away out of gunshot. And who, I wondered dully, was to gather what was left of my two score horsemen? It did not matter. Never now would I ride at the head of two score men to the gates of Cashlean-na-Kirka. Never now would I see the light in the dark eyes of a maid. Never now—never now.

Donn Maguire's low whistle called me, and I walked across to his side. He held his great ax ready and looked at me out of wild, deadly eyes.

"They come," he whispered. "Listen."

I heard nothing. I laid my hand on his arm.

"Donn," I said, "let the last rally be here in the open."

I drew him back from the doorway, and willingly he came.

"Let it be so, long man," he murmured, oddly resigned.

The man who came, came quietly, and we let him come. Almost before we knew, his morioned head appeared out of the dark spiral. It stayed moveless there, looking at us.

"Come on," I cried. "Two at a time, and no quarter."

At that he came up and stood still in the doorway. And he was Sir Francis Vaughan.

But a very different Sir Francis Vaughan. No courtier this. This man was haggard and grim and strong—and very cool: his eyes steady in black-rimmed deep sockets, grim battle writ all over him. He carried broadsword in one hand and petronel in the other. I was sorry that I had to fight this man.

He thrust petronel in belt and dropped the point of his sword.

"Enough killing," he said quietly. "You are my prisoners."

"Never—never," cried Donn Maguire hoarsely, throwing up his ax. "I will never surrender to hang in a Sassenach gibbet."

"David Gordon," said Vaughan, "tell your friend that ye are my prisoners and will be honorably treated."

Maguire looked wildly at me, and I held his arm.

"A man of finest honor, Donn," I told him.

And Donn drew his hand across his eyes.

(To be concluded)

"Hoist 'em high, Swede!"

COTTON TOP

By WALT COBURN

THE voice that came from behind the crude black mask was harsh, disguised.

"Shell out, bank men! I'm in a rush!"

The hold-up man's six-shooter covered the teller and cashier. He shoved a gunnysack through the cashier's wicket.

"Dump it all in there. Gold, foldin' money and dollar silver. Keep your chicken feed."

The cashier and teller obeyed without protest. The hold-up man took the bulging sack.

"Lay down on the floor on your bellies. Stay there five minutes."

The man wore a long yellow slicker that concealed his clothes. His eyes were slits that showed through the holes cut in the black silk handkerchief.

He backed out of the bank, his gun in his hand, and closed the door behind him. Rounding the corner of the little cow town bank, he swung aboard a big white horse that was waiting there. He rode out of town without showing himself on the main street, heading for the

fringe of cottonwoods and willows that marked Milk River. In less than five minutes, riding at a long lope, he was out of sight of the little cow town of Wagon Wheel, Montana.

It was half an hour before the deputy sheriff and a small posse got organized and took the trail. That was about four in the afternoon, the bank's closing hour. Some hours after dark they returned.

"No ketchum," Deputy Sheriff Bob Lint told the bank men. "Lost his trail along the river where there's horses grazin'. Their tracks blotted out the tracks of his white horse. I damn near drowned swimmin' the river. The water's high, swift and cold as a banker's heart."

The bank cashier, Harry Mason, shot an angry look at the tall, raw-boned deputy. Harry Mason and his father, R. T. Mason, had, a year ago, acquired the Stockman's Bank. Right after its failure and the suicide of its founder and former President, John McKenna, a pioneer cattleman who had sold his ranch and turned banker. Harry Mason was in his late twenties, a natty dresser and the real ladies' man of Wagon Wheel. He was tall, of the slender build that delights a tailor. He had the thin, high bridged nose of his father. But his mouth, under the slender little moustache, was petulant, his chin a little weak.

"Cold as a banker's heart?" he echoed. They were in the Elk Saloon and the bar was lined with town citizens and two or three cowboys. They were grinning at the big deputy's remark. "I resent that, Lint."

"Cold as a banker's heart, Mason. Don't forget I owned a little spread of my own down the river till R. T. Mason foreclosed and crowded me out."

"I don't think you tried very hard to catch up with that bandit," snapped Harry Mason, his pale cheeks a little flushed. "Your whole attitude shows that you were willing to let him get away."

"HOLD on, mister." Bob Lint's voice was a lazy drawl, but his gray eyes, set under heavy black brows, had narrowed a little. "The sheriff of this county gave me a deputy's job when I went broke. I took an oath when he pinned my badge on me. I aim to keep that oath, regardless. Even if it was my best friend that held up your damned bank, I'd made a hard stab at ketchin' him. If you was a man instead of a purty dude, I'd take off my badge and gun and slap you sillier than you look now."

"Sounds like the roar of a silver tip grizzly," called a lazy voice from the doorway. A tall, lean muscled, deeply tanned cowboy stood just inside the swinging half doors. His eyes were blue under sun-bleached brows. The hair under his slanted hat crown was so tow colored it looked white. He had a short nose and blunt jaw. His grin was wide. He stood on long, slightly bowed legs, thumbs hooked in the service worn cartridge belt that hung slanted across his slim flanks.

The big deputy's scowl faded. He grinned faintly. "H'are yuh, Cotton Top? You didn't see anything of a bank robbin' gent ridin' a white horse anywhere on your range? He's wearin' a yaller slicker and has a black handkerchief tied acrost his face. He crossed Milk River if he ain't bushed up somewheres on this side."

"Did he have a pack of hounds follerin' him, Bob?" asked Cotton Top Dial, wagon-boss of the Wagon Wheel Pool outfit. His face was solemn.

"Did he have a pack of hounds, Mason?" Deputy Sheriff Bob Lint turned to the bank cashier.

"Or a mole on his left flank?" questioned Cotton Dial, his bleached brows knitting as if he were thinking deeply.

"R. T.," said the cashier, gulping down his ginger ale highball, "will be here on the next train from Helena. He'll have law officers with him that won't spend their time guzzling whiskey." Harry Mason turned on his heel and walked out, followed by the stoop shouldered, gimlet eyed teller, whose name was Marks. Marks had a hawk nose and thin lipped mouth that never smiled. He knew more about banking than R. T. Mason and his son Harry put together.

"If R. T. gets you fired, Bob," said Cotton, his spurs jingling as he came to the bar, "you kin git a horse wranglin'

job with the Pool outfit. You've round-sided here in town too long to make a real hand any more."

"I've got a mind to run you in for insultin' the law, you long geared horse thief. What fetches you to town?"

"Business, Johnny Law. Business. The bosses sent me to dicker with R. T. for an extension on some notes they can't take up till we ship a trainload or two of steers."

"Hoorawin' his dude son is shore goin' to help you, ain't it? That tailor's dummy is the pride and joy of that hard shelled money lender's life."

"R. T. Mason," grinned Cotton Dial, "ain't goin' to let any such fool thing as that keep him from makin' his Jesse James interest on paper that's backed by the Wagon Wheel Pool."

"You wouldn't bet a new hat on it, would you, my cow punchin' amigo?"

"The best hat Stetson makes in my size seven, badge polisher."

"It's a deal, young feller," grinned the big deputy. "R. T.'s bank was cleaned out this afternoon of what Tailor Made Harry claims will tally up to thirty thousand dollars. All that bank robber left 'em was cigarette money. R. T.'s goin' to have big fits and little 'uns. He won't be extendin' ary notes. More likely he'll be callin' in all the money that's owin' the bank."

"Banks, you bonehead, are covered by insurance. You'll be buyin' me a hat tomorrow."

"I'm pullin' out alone at daybreak. Won't be here to collect my hat. Order it for me—black color, size seven and a quarter."

"Let's git a cup of coffee," suggested Cotton.

OUTSIDE the saloon, Cotton Dial and the big deputy halted.

"You seen Martha lately?" Cotton asked a little awkwardly.

"Every day, pardner."

"She still feels like she did about—"

"She still blames you and the Wagon Wheel Pool, Cotton, for her dad's killin' hisself."

"That gives you an open field, I reckon, Bob."

"Not so open. Slick Haired Harry is runnin' a length ahead."

"That dude? You mean a girl like Martha McKenna would take to a dude like Harry Mason?"

"Mason's got money. At least his old man is lousy with it. And Mary is just a workin' girl now. Handsome Harry's got her workin' in the bank."

"The hell! She wasn't there when the feller robbed the bank, was she?"

"She works mornin's. Let's git that coffee."

"When I put Red Light up. Order me steak smothered with onions. I'll meet you at the Chinaman's."

Bob Lint had to go with Cotton to the hitchrack and rub the nose of the big mahogany bag horse Red Light, the horse that had helped Cotton Dial win many a calf and steer roping contest.

"If ever you go to the pen for rustlin' or git hung for killin' Hair Tonic Harry," said Bob Lint, "I want this Red Light horse."

"If anything ever happens to me, Bob," grinned Cotton, "he's yours."

Cotton swung into the saddle and rode down the dark street to the feed barn.

Deputy Sheriff Bob Lint walked on to the Chinaman's. He and Cotton had punched cows together for years. Cotton ran the Wagon Wheel Pool round-up wagon and worked for Uncle Bill Delaney, Jay Jaycox and Lige Fox, the three ranchers who ran cattle on the same range and composed the Pool. Bob could have gone to work for the outfit when the bank closed him out. Instead he had asked the sheriff for the deputy's job. Bob and Cotton seldom met except when Cotton was in town or the deputy had business that took him across Milk River to the Pool range that ran north to the Canadian line.

At the Chinaman's Bob Lint ordered two steaks. He rolled a cigarette, shoved it between his lips. But he did not light it. He sat there for perhaps a minute, examining his hands curiously. Then he went back to the kitchen and washed up in the wash shed behind. Cotton was sitting at the oilcloth covered table reading the paper when Bob Lint came back into the restaurant.

"It says here, Bob, that Swede Jackson broke out of the Deer Lodge pen. They had him workin' at the prison ranch. He knocked the guard on the head with a wagon spoke and got away."

"Yeah. The Swede's out."

"Swede Jackson's bad medicine, Bob."

"He's bad enough," nodded the big deputy. "He's made the brag that the law won't take him alive."

"And he said when he was sent up," said Cotton, "that if ever he got out, he'd look you up and gut-shoot yuh."

"I was thinkin' of that today when Hair Lip Harry located me and told me his papa's bank had bin stuck up."

"You figure it was Swede Jackson, then, that did the job?"

"The whole town has it all figured out for me," grinned Bob Lint. "That saves me the trouble of doin' ary guessin'. Tie into that T bone before it gits cold."

R. T. MASON was a tall, stiff-backed man whose smile had no trace of warmth and whose pale gray eyes matched the expression of his mouth when it tightened to a thin line. There was no trace of weakness about the father of Harry Mason. He was shrewd, hard, ruthless.

He had the sheriff and a bank insurance detective with him. And his dismissal of Cotton Top Dial and his request, was curt, insulting.

Cotton left an order for a new Stetson hat in Deputy Sheriff Bob Lint's box at the Post Office, saddled his Red Light horse and rode out of town. He forded Milk River at a wide, shallow crossing and headed for the round-up camp at the forks of Whitewater. He was holding a big herd there. The three owners of the Wagon Wheel Pool were to be at camp today to trim the herd for an early fall shipment to Chicago. Cotton had ordered cars to be at the Wagon Wheel stockyards the following Friday, giving him a week to get his cattle shaped and slow herded to town for loading.

Cotton reached the round-up camp just as the outfit was eating their noon dinner.

Uncle Bill Delaney, white-whiskered, oldest of the three, was a short, heavy man in his sixties. He walked with a cane that he carried on his saddle and would let no man top off his horse for him of a frosty morning. When one of his string of horses took a notion to pitch, Uncle Bill Delaney rode him with an ease that reminded Jay Jaycox and Lige Fox of the old trail days when Bill Delaney had been as pretty a bronc rider as you would find between the Mexican border and the Canadian line.

Jay Jaycox was rawboned, with graying red hair and mustache. He stood six feet three in his socks and was the smoothest roper that you would want to watch heel calves and drag them to the branding fire. He had an easy grin and a slow temper; no man who had ever watched him fight had ever tried to rouse that temper.

Lige Fox was a leathery little bow-legged cowman with sharp blue eyes, a bald head and a crotchety manner which hid a softness that had its outlet in such deeds of kindness as staking broken down prospectors, wintering stove-up old cowhands, clothing and feeding derelict men and women. Uncle Bill Delaney and Jay Jaycox dared not let on that they were aware of these secret charitable acts that kept Lige Fox half broke most of the time. Cotton Dial acted for little old Lige in these matters. Lige Fox had told Cotton that he would shoot him if he ever let out the secret.

THE three partners were sitting apart from the cowboys. They had their plates heaped with grub, their cups filled with coffee. Cotton filled his plate and cup and joined them.

"R. T.," he told them, "was about as easy to handle as a rattlesnake when I tackled him this mornin'. Some gent held up his bank yesterday evenin' and he's on the prod. Said he was clampin' down hard unless them notes were paid off in cash. That there wasn't any use in you gents tryin' to git out of payin' him off. The notes come due in four days."

Lige Fox choked on a piece of meat, cussed, sputtering. Jay Jaycox grinned. Uncle Bill Delaney tugged at his white whiskers.

"We told you, Cotton," said Uncle

Bill Delaney, sopping a chunk of dutch oven bread in his gravy, "that you'd be wastin' breath a-talkin' to that skinflint. He wants the Wagon Wheel layout. He's closed out most of the little spreads like Bob Lint's. Now he's goin' after bigger game."

"I'm turnin' these cattle loose," said Jay Jaycox. "The price we'd get for this shipment of beef won't do us any good to apply on those bank notes now.

"Have the boys drift 'em plumb outa the country." Lige Fox's voice crackled like sticks being broken. "Trail 'em to Wyoming. Let the Injuns and rustlers butcher 'em. I got a mind to ride to town and do the country a good turn by killin' off that blood-suckin' weasel!"

"Not a bad idee, Lige," grinned Jay Jaycox. "But seems to me I read somewheres where there's a law ag'in' killin' bankers. Strange as it seems, there ain't no open season on two legged wolves like R. T. Mason."

"If John McKenna was alive and still had the bank," said Uncle Bill Delaney, "he'd carry us till hell froze."

"John carried too many old friends thataway," said Jay Jaycox. "That's why he went busted and shot hisself."

Lige Fox was on his feet with a jerk. Battered hat slanted across his eyes that were twin blue sparks.

"John McKenna never killed hisself! Not by a damn sight. I don't give a damn what the coroner said. John never pulled the trigger on the gun that killed him! John McKenna was murdered! I told you so before. I'm tellin' you now. And if the truth could be proved, that bank of his wasn't busted, neither. Marks, if a man would hogtie him and work on him with a hot brandin' iron, would tell how that dirty bankin' trick was worked.

"What did John McKenna know about bankin'? He come up the trail from Texas, the same as we did. He hired Marks to take care of the books and the inside workin's of the bank. Marks run that bank to suit hisself. I got a mind to rope that hook-beaked, weasel-eyed, hump-shouldered thing and drag him acrost rocks and brush and prickly pear till he squeals the truth!"

"Not a bad idee," agreed Jay Jaycox. "But there you run up ag'in' the law once more."

"Damn the law if it protects snakes!" snapped Lige Fox.

"Mebbyso that's what the feller that robbed the bank yesterday figgered," grinned Cotton Dial. He took a soiled, crumpled envelope from his pocket and handed it to Uncle Bill Delaney.

"It was in the mail box this mornin'. Had 'Wagon Wheel Pool' written acrost it. Thinkin' it was from some rancher wantin' us to gather and ship his cattle with ours, I opened it. Read 'er aloud, Uncle Bill. But not too loud."

"Send Cotton Dial to the old Hideaway if you want to pay off R. T. with his own money. The Pool done me a good turn once. I ain't forgot. Swede."

There was a moment of silence. Uncle Bill Delaney tugged at his white chin whiskers, staring hard at the scrawled note.

Jay Jaycox was grinning faintly, looking from Uncle Bill to Lige Fox who was swearing softly under his breath, his blue eyes bright.

"A feller from town stopped at camp early this mornin'," said Uncle Bill Delaney slowly. "He told us that Swede Jackson had broke out of the pen last week and had stuck up the bank yesterday. That he got off with thirty thousand dollars. The Swede worked for the outfit off and on for some years before he turned bad and taken to the outlaw trail. But I don't recollect ary favors we ever done him."

"He's helped hisself to a Wagon Wheel horse now and then when he needed one in his business," said Jay Jaycox. "I whupped him once, about ten years ago."

Uncle Bill Delaney and Jay Jaycox were looking at little Lige Fox intently, their eyes questioning him.

"Quit your damn' goggle-eyed starin' at a man!" snapped Lige. He glared at Cotton.

"Wipe that fool grin off your face, you cotton-topped young idiot! I got a mind to fire yuh! Well? Well, you two ol' fossils! Say somethin', can't yuh? Me, I'd say call the Swede's bet. We kin use some of that blamed money and I don't give a damn how he come by it. Later,

we kin make out to square it somehow."

Lige Fox walked away, headed for the rope corral into which the horse wrangler was putting the remuda.

"Like as not," said Uncle Bill, "Lige has helped the Swede out some time or another. Jay, if that conscience of yourn won't keep you awake of a night, I'm willin' to let Cotton make that ride to the old Hideaway."

"Payin' R. T. with his own money sounds like hymn music to my ears," chuckled Jay. "Saddle your ridge runner, Cotton."

"You don't reckon it's a trick to bushwhack you, Cotton? Didn't you and Swede Jackson have a run-in a couple of years ago at the Calgary stampede?"

"Swede was drunk and I had to trim him some. We shook hands after." Cotton's voice was casual. "Bob Lint's the man Swede Jackson never got along with. Bob arrested him last year when he was sent up for horse stealin'. Bob's out after him now. But he thinks the Swede's headed for the Canadian line, not south towards the badlands along the Missouri. No, Swede Jackson ain't bushwhackin' me. I'll meet him. It's my guess he ain't doin' this just to pay off some favor Lige has done him. Swede Jackson wants somethin'. I'll make the dicker with him. Then I'll ride on across the Missouri River to Lewistown, and deposit the money in the Lewistown Bank to your credit. You kin pay R. T. off with a check or draft on the Lewistown Bank. And just in case Marks has the serial numbers of the currency, I'll have the stolen money swapped for honest money before I go to the bank. I got friends around that cow town that will do me the favor and not charge more than a thousand dollars commission on the deal."

Uncle Bill Delaney eyed Cotton closely. "Son, you're bustin' hell out of the law if you do this. If you're ketched—"

"The deal's off," agreed Jay Jaycox. "We never asked you to turn a crooked deal yet, son. We ain't lettin' you start now."

"I reckon," said Cotton Top Dial, "that nothin' you kin say will stop me. I had 'er all figgered out before I got back to camp here. I'm meetin' Swede Jackson. That money is goin' into the Lewistown Bank. When my daddy was killed, I was ten years old. You three Wagon Wheel gents give me my first job wranglin' horses. You raised me from a button. It's the first chance I've ever had to git back at you and I'm not lettin' you talk me out of it. Come dusk, I'm pullin' out. You kin drift this herd back onto the range and turn 'em loose. Cancel the cars I ordered."

COTTON TOP DIAL had a notion that he was being trailed. Because it was a seventy-five mile ride from the forks of Whitewater south across Milk River to the old Hideaway near the Little Rockies, he had started out at dusk. Before he reached Milk River, riding at a long trot, he was certain that at least one rider was trailing him.

Cotton figured it might be one of the Wagon Wheel owners who had elected to cold trail him and lend a hand in case he got into some sort of trouble with Swede Jackson. It would be like Uncle Bill Delaney and Jay and little old Lige Fox to decide Cotton needed a man to side him in a tight. If that happened to be the case, then the well meaning cold-trailer would have to be stopped. Because this was a one-man job and a dangerous one—far more dangerous than the owners of the Wagon Wheel Pool realized.

Cotton reached the heavy brush where the trail led from the sloping hills to the river bank. He pulled off the trail a way and left his horse. Then he went back on foot, squatted behind a heavy clump of brush and waited.

There was a half moon that gave sufficient light. Cotton heard the rider coming at a trot. He grinned to himself as he anticipated the jolt of surprise he would give to whichever of the three Wagon Wheel Pool owners was trailing him.

The horse and rider came into sight. A moving silhouette against the star filled, moonlit sky.

The grin was wiped suddenly from Cotton's face as he recognized the rider. Deputy Sheriff Bob Lint!

Cotton crouched lower. He hoped his

hidden horse would not nicker and that Bob would not pull up at the river crossing and look the ground over for sign. Bob passed within twenty feet of where Cotton was hiding. He could see the grim set to Bob's jaw as he rode, his weight in the stirrups, his right hand near his gun. Bob's face looked drawn and hard in the white light of the moon. There was something about the big deputy's whole bearing that made Cotton's stomach muscles tighten. Cotton held his breath. He was afraid Bob's horse would scent him and Bob might be watching the animal's tell-tale ears.

But Bob's big black gelding traveled on past without turning its head. Cotton heard the splashing of water as Eclipse took the river at the shallow crossing. He slipped through the brush to a place from where he could see the wide stretch of river, and saw horse and rider in midstream.

Cotton made his way back to his horse as fast as he could travel without making too much noise in the brush. He mounted and rode back a piece, then cut for the deeper crossing a couple of miles downstream — Bob Lint might notice that there were no wet tracks on the south bank of the crossing. If Bob was any kind of trailer, he would look for fresh tracks on the south bank where a wet horse had crossed. He would find no such sign. He might turn back. Or he might ride either up or down the river in hopes of cutting fresh sign where Cotton had crossed.

Cotton was plenty worried now. The man he was riding to meet, big Swede Jackson, had never liked Bob Lint. Even before the Swede had turned outlaw a couple of years ago, there had been bad blood between the two cowpunchers when they both worked for the Wagon Wheel Pool. Cotton had prevented a shooting scrape between the two at the Calgary Stampede, where the Swede and Bob Lint had competed against each other in the bronc riding and bulldogging.

Swede Jackson was ornery when he got a few drinks under his belt. He had been half drunk at Calgary. Had picked a fight with Bob in behind the bucking chutes. Cotton had jumped from the top rail of the bucking chute, knocking the Swede's gun from his hand. Swede Jackson had tried to whip Cotton, but had been too drunk and clumsy to do the job. Cotton had the Swede licked before the police got to them. Afterward Swede Jackson had shaken hands.

Swede Jackson, as did every man in the Wagon Wheel outfit, liked Cotton Top Dial. And Swede Jackson still believed that it was Cotton's money, not Lige Fox's thousand dollars, that had once help him out of an ugly deal that would have sent him to the Deer Lodge pen.

Swede Jackson certainly was not setting any trap for Cotton when they met at the Hideaway. Quite the contrary. But if Bob Lint trailed Cotton to the Swede's hide-out, there would be gun trouble. Cotton told himself that he had to give the big deputy the slip tonight. Otherwise the whole deal would go to smash.

THAT lower crossing, the crossing used yesterday by Bob Lint when he was on the trail of the bank robber, was deep and swift and treacherous. It had whirlpools and under-currents, waterlogged snags that might entangle a horse and rider. Dangerous enough by daylight, to tackle it at night was sheer foolhardiness.

Cotton was riding a big brown horse he had named Brown Jug. He loosened the saddle cinch; pulling off his boots, he tied them to his saddle. He unbuckled his heavy cartridge belt and buckled it through his saddle cantle, shoving his six-shooter into the waistband of his overalls and tying it fast with a buckskin string. Brown Jug was a good water horse but, even so, if they had tough luck out there, Cotton might have to quit the horse and swim for it.

But he hadn't much fear of the river. It was Bob Lint that filled his mind, crowding everything else from his thoughts. Why was Bob Lint trailing him? And the answer he kept finding in his mind was giving him a sick, empty feeling in the pit of his stomach.

He eased Brown Jug into the black, muddy water. When the horse hit swim-

ming water, Cotton slipped from the saddle and clung to the big brown's tail. That far bank seemed miles away. The water was cold and kept pulling horse and rider downstream.

Brown Jug hit one of the waterlogged tree trunks that was floating sluggishly downstream. For perhaps a minute there was confusion and splashing as the frightened horse pawed the log. Cotton pulled himself alongside by the saddle strings, fought with the big horse to get free of the submerged snag. It seemed an eternity before they were swimming clear again, another eternity before Brown Jug's forefeet struck solid ground and the horse lunged ashore. Cotton was back in the saddle, the bridle reins in his hand.

He dismounted only long enough to tighten the saddle cinch, then headed south at a long trot as soon as the big brown gelding had its wind again. He poured the water from his boots and pulled them on as he rode. He buckled on his cartridge belt and shoved his six-shooter back in its holster. It took more than river water to foul a single action Colt six-shooter so that it would not work.

Cotton rode hard, avoiding any trail, cutting straight across bottom country into the rolling hills. Whenever he could he kept from skylighting himself. The sheriff from the county seat at Chinook would have a posse out. Perhaps the bank insurance detective would be leading another posse. Cotton was not going to run into any of these law officers if he could help it. He could give them a plausible excuse for being south of Milk River tonight. He could tell them that he was riding to one of the big outfits like the Circle C to make some kind of a trade for Uncle Bill Delaney and Jay Jaycox and Lige Fox.

But he did not want to run into anyone. It would mean a delay. He might not get to the old Hideaway in time to make his dicker with Swede Jackson.

THREE times during that long night's ride Cotton sighted little bunches of riders. They were riding in groups of three and four when they went after a tough hombre like Swede Jackson. The Swede had made the brag many times that if ever he got out of the pen, the law would never take him alive.

Only Bob Lint was riding alone. Bob had no fear of Swede Jackson or any other man.

Last year he had taken the Swede without any help. Broken the outlaw's gun arm with his first shot, then beat him unconscious and fetched him into Chinook tied in his own saddle.

Few men knew the exact location of the Hideaway and how to locate it. The sheriff, Cotton felt certain, had never been there, nor had that bank insurance detective. There was only a remote chance that any man in the posse would know of its location. Even if they did, they would not be anxious to ride into the heart of the badlands at night to reach it.

The Hideaway was in a deep cut-coulee where the brush and scrub pines grew thick. And from a certain vantage point a single outlaw could pick off any number of men as they came, as they must come, single file, down the steep, narrow trail.

Bob Lint and Cotton knew the location of the Hideaway. They had ridden there together once or twice when they were punching cows. Bob Lint could find the dim trail at night and follow it, even as Cotton was following it now by certain landmarks. For there was no one beaten trail to that old outlaw camp. You spotted your landmarks and picked your own way through the broken country.

Cotton had changed horses twice on his night's ride, once at the Hog Ranch stage station, again at the Circle C ranch.

Each change had been made by riding into the horse pasture, changing his saddle to a fresh horse and turning his leg-weary mount loose. The horse he now rode wore the Circle C brand. He had covered that seventy-five miles between dusk and dawn.

Cotton Top Dial was now leading a saddled horse which he had picked up in a small pasture near the foot of the Little Rockies. The brand on the horse was blotched. He had dug the saddle

out of some heavy buckbrush where he had cached it a week ago. He had slipped a hackamore on the horse instead of a bridle and now led the animal by the hackamore rope.

He reached the scrub pines at the head of the steep trail that led down into the Hideaway. He pulled up and waited for several minutes. Dawn was creeping into the sky.

Cotton cupped his hands to his mouth and gave a fairly good imitation of an owl hooting. This was a pre-arranged signal.

From the black shadows down below where the hidden cabin and corral and barn were, came the same owlhoot signal. Leading the saddled horse, Cotton rode down the steep, narrow trail.

His gun was in his hand and his horse picked its way down. It covered the big man who met him in the small clearing in front of the cabin.

"It taken you a hell of a long time, Cotton." The big man's voice was a surly growl.

"Better late than never, Swede. How did the grub hold out?"

"I got a hunk of meat and some salt left. You fetch a horse that'll pack me?"

"As good a horse as you ever forked. Just stand where you are, Swede. If you try to rush me, I'll shoot the belly off yuh. There's five hundred dollars tied in a little salt sack in the right hand saddle pocket.

"I need a gun. I got to have a gun, Cotton!"

"All you need is a horse that'll take you outa Montana, Swede. Your game is runnin', not gun fightin'."

"You drive a hell of a tough bargain, Cotton Top."

"I could have turned you over to Bob Lint a week ago after I ketched you. Your memory is short, Swede. I stake you to a ridge runner horse and five hundred dollars, hide you out where the law can't find you. You give me your word that you would hit the trail and never come back. That you'd never try to go gunnin' after Bob Lint. Fork your horse, Swede, and git. My gun's coverin' you and I'll use it if you try ary tricks. Git goin'. You know the trail into Wyoming and on south to Mexico. Take it."

"You helped me once before, Cotton. You're givin' me a better break now than any other man would give me. Just why, I don't know, because Bob Lint is a pardner of your'n and I come back from Deer Lodge to kill him. I'd have got the job done, too, if you hadn't ketched me like you done."

"It's gittin' daylight up on top. No time for augerin', Swede. Git goin'."

"So long, Cotton." Swede Jackson mounted his horse.

"So long, Swede. I'll foller behind you up the trail."

IT WAS that hour at the beginning of dawn when the last stars fade and the moon is setting in the west. The hour when the coyote, its night's prowl finished, yaps crazily, then slinks to its den under the sandstone rimrocks. The hoot owl sounds his final, mournful call and wings his way to his roost before the daylight blinds him. Off in the distance the meadowlark sings his morning carol. Bluejays and magpies awake, scolding and quarreling. The blacktail deer and antelope quit their beds and slip down to the river's edge to water.

It is the hour when the badlands begins to slip from its black shadow of mystery. In half an hour its rough hills will stand revealed. But for perhaps half an hour that dim, uncertain light holds, as though waiting for hunted men to hide themselves for another day.

At the top of the trail Cotton could barely make out the shadowy outline of Swede Jackson and his horse. But something about the Swede's movements warned the Wagon Wheel Pool boss. He knew that Swede Jackson had a six-shooter. He must have had a gun and cartridges cached there at the Hideaway. A week ago Cotton had left him there afoot and without a gun—left him with the promise that he would return with a horse and enough money for a getaway stake. Swede Jackson had given Cotton his promise to quit the country and never come back. The Swede had sworn never to try to harm Bob Lint. It had been a bargain.

Cotton could make out something of the Swede's movements in the gray light that was like a fog. He saw the outlaw lift a bottle to his mouth and heard the crash of breaking glass as the escaped convict tossed away the empty bottle.

"I had that quart cached there for more'n a year," his harsh voice told Cotton. "Had me a gun cached there, likewise. Why, you tow-headed young fool, I could have killed you when you rode down to the cabin with this horse. If you had fetched anybody with you, I'd have opened up a little bombardment. I stayed sober a-purpose to put up a fast fight in case you double-crossed me. Likker hits a man quick when he ain't used to it. This is the first bottle I've had since Bob Lint sent me to the pen. I got a horse between my legs now, an' whiskey in my belly. A six-shooter in my hand again. I'm headin' straight for the town of Wagon Wheel and I'm killin' Bob Lint where I cut his trail. I'm killin'—"

"Hoist 'em high, Swede!"

That was Bob Lint's voice. It came from a patch of brush not twenty feet from where Swede Jackson sat his horse.

Swede Jackson's six-shooter spat flame. There was a crashing of underbrush.

Bob Lint's gun blazed, the bullet going wild. Bob Lint had been hit by Swede Jackson's first shot.

"Damn your ornery heart, Swede!" Cotton shouted.

The Swede's bullet nicked Cotton's cheek. A second shot grazed his ribs. Then Cotton's gun was spewing flame. He had spurred his horse between Swede Jackson and the brush patch that concealed the wounded deputy. Cotton was shooting to kill now. And he was not missing. His .45 slugs were tearing the big outlaw's belly. Swede Jackson swayed drunkenly in his saddle. His heavy hand jerked his horse back on its hind legs. The horse reared and went over backward.

The horse scrambled to its feet, trotting off, snorting. Swede Jackson's big body was sprawled in an awkward heap, face downward. Even before Cotton quit his horse and bent over the Swede, he knew the man was dead.

Bob Lint came from behind the brush. His right arm dangled limply from the shoulder. Blood was spreading in a slow smear on his shirt sleeve and shoulder. He held his six-shooter in his left hand.

"You got the job done, you cotton-topped son," he said, a grin on his pain-set face. "Saved my hide, and no mistake. That locoed Swede would have got me. Dead, ain't he?"

"The shootin' will fetch the sheriff and his men, Cotton. Just in case there's questions asked, I had you deputized. That'll explain what you're doin' off the Wagon Wheel range and how you happened to kill Swede Jackson, here at the top of the trail that leads down to the Hideaway. You let me do the talkin'."

From a distance came shouting. The sheriff and the bank insurance detective.

"Let me have a look at that busted shoulder of yours, Bob."

"That'll wait. The sheriff and that long nosed bank detective will be here directly. It will save trouble if that stolen bank money is found on Swede Jackson."

Cotton faced the wounded deputy. Bob Lint was grinning faintly, now, as their eyes met and held.

"Marks is in jail," said Bob Lint.

"He's done confessed that he murdered John McKenna and doctored the bank books to make it look like the bank had gone busted. R. T. hired him to do the job. I got him and Handsome Harry locked up. When the bank opens up in a day or so, Martha McKenna will be its new owner, and it won't be busted by a long shot. Martha's renewin' such notes as the Wagon Wheel Pool has. The Pool won't need the money that was stole from the bank. While I'm signalin' the sheriff, Cotton, look the Swede over and see if he ain't got that money on him."

Deputy Sheriff Bob Lint walked off a ways, deliberately turning his back on Cotton. Bob lifted his six-shooter, pointed it at the sky and shot three times, counting ten between each shot.

COTTON TOP knelt beside the dead outlaw. Reaching in under his shirt, he unbuckled a money belt, the leather pockets of which bulged. He buckled it around the dead Swede's waist, underneath the blood-stained shirt. Then he stood up.

"There's five hundred in the Swede's saddle pocket, Bob," he said quietly. "You'll find the rest in the money belt buckled under his shirt."

The sheriff and bank insurance detective rode up, their guns in their hands, followed by a dozen or more possemen.

"Put your guns up," said Bob Lint. "Swede Jackson busted my gun arm with his first shot. He'd have got me if Cotton Dial hadn't bin sidin' me. Whatever reward there is goes to Cotton. He cut down Swede Jackson and recovered the stolen money. Likewise he saved my life. Where's the doctor you packed along with your posse, sheriff? I want him to tie up this arm of mine. I reckon you and the bank detective kin take charge of Swede Jackson and the money. I'm goin' on to town with Cotton."

Bob Lint kept them from questioning Cotton.

"Cotton never killed a man till now. Naturally, he don't want to be answerin' a lot of damn fool questions. You got Swede Jackson's carcass, sheriff. This detective gent has his money. The payoff's made. The game's over. Cotton's got a round-up he's got to git back to. He's got no more time to waste here."

COTTON TOP DIAL and Deputy Sheriff Bob Lint rode away together into the sunrise. There was a silence between them that held until they were riding, stirrups touching, along the wide trail to the cow-town of Wagon Wheel. Bob Lint jingled a pair of handcuffs, grinning sideways, his eyes watching Cotton.

"The bank robber," Bob Lint said casually, "rode a white horse. That night in town, I was rubbin' Red Light's foretop. When I got to the Chinaman's I notice the palms of my hands is all white. The white washed off easy, without soap. It was like the white stuff they use in circuses sometimes to whiten horses so's they look purty. Roll me a smoke, you son of a gun."

Cotton grinned sheepishly. He rolled and lit a brown paper cigarette and handed it to Bob.

"Martha wants to see you, Cotton," Bob went on. "She wants to explain how she never once blamed you and the Wagon Wheel Pool's notes at the bank for making her father kill hisself. Because Martha and I had it figgered from the start that John McKenna had bin murdered. There was no powder burns. And Martha knew that the bank wasn't busted by a good many thousand dollars. It was my idea that she freeze up on you and play up to Hair Tonic Harry. Git a job in the bank and git a chance to go over all the books and records in the vault.

"Which she did. And all the time it was hurtin' her to treat you like you was loco weed. Martha loves you, bonehead. Always did. Me, I figgered like a big brother and nothin' more. I got a girl in Calgary. Met her when we contested at the Calgary Stampede. Now that Martha is givin' me back the ranch R. T. stole from me, I'm sendin' for her.

"Yeah, Martha got her bank job. She was in behind a partition workin' on the books when the bank was held up. When a girl like Martha McKenna is in love with a man it takes more than a slicker and a mask to fool her. And the hold-up gent was wearin' a pair of spurs she'd given Cotton Top Dial for Christmas once."

Cotton dropped his knotted bridle reins over his saddle horn and held out his hands towards the handcuffs.

Bob Lint shook his head and grinned widely, shoving the handcuffs into the pocket of his chaps.

"Nobody in the cow country will ever believe but what Swede Jackson held up the bank. Anyhow, you're goin' to be the big hero around these parts, young feller. Martha says I kin be best man at the weddin'. Or we could make 'er a double weddin' if you two love-bit things kin wait till my girl gits down from Calgary."

"The Pool gents," said Cotton, "are like three fathers to me. I couldn't let 'em go under. I ketched Swede Jackson a week ago, hid him out and set him afoot. I made him write a letter and sign it, and I mailed the letter the night I met you in town. Got it out of the post office next mornin' and took it out to the round-up. It would hurt them old boys to know I'd done anything crooked."

"You're dead wrong, bonehead. If you won't tell 'em, Martha and I will. It ain't fair to Uncle Bill and Jay and Lige to cheat 'em out of that story, even if they can't tell it outside, braggin' about the damn fool, boneheaded loyalty of Cotton Top Dial. We'll tell 'em, pardner. You and me and Martha. I look for the three of 'em to git a little likkered up and mebbyso paint the cow-town of Wagon Wheel redder than a sunset the night of the weddin'. We'll tell 'em then. Give 'em somethin' else to holler loud about when they shoot at the stars."

Cotton grinned. "You quittin' the deputy job, Bob?"

"Turnin' in my badge today."

"I'd like to have those handcuffs. Kind of a souvenir. I'm swappin' you Red Light for 'em, pardner."

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Bullets ignored de Barrois, leading the advance in plain sight.

A LAMP-POST for the VISCOUNT

By GEORGES SURDEZ

"IT IS my deepest conviction that an officer should be born a gentleman," Captain Alexandre de Barrois drawled. "Because, you know, certain virtues and qualities of leadership cannot be improvised, but need generations of breeding. That is an admitted biological principle for animals, speed in race horses for instance—"

That evening, at the mess table of the march battalion of the Foreign Legion quartered at Dar-Makhzen, Morocco, the captain had much more to say on the same topic. As the orderlies were neither deaf nor mute, and the outfit was idle between two expeditions, those words were picked up and repeated throughout the companies.

They would have been sufficient to ruin any other officer overnight. Another would have faced a company of surly, sulking men. But, it being de Barrois, his Legionnaires laughed, and his popularity was established.

"The damn snob!" they said between gulps for breath. "The old crab! That must have been good. The major's face must have been something! And Pandrier!"

They called their captain a snob, and they were right. De Barrois was a snob, an arch-snob. The captain openly preached the supremacy of caste, of birth—and his reputation was made!

Less fortunate officers have sought the secret of popularity in vain. De Barrois was immediately loved because he was amusing. His attitude was that of a knight of old towards his valiant villagers turned men-at-arms, kindly aloof, severe, tolerant. He was old for a captain, even in the service of France—forty-seven or eight, a very tall, bony man, who strutted very straight, with an icy bearing.

When addressing subordinates, his speech was clipped, pruned of all unnecessary words. And he broke another rule, that requiring an officer to know his men by names.

This, which would have infuriated his men normally, was another source of merriment.

"D'you hear what his orderly says? The other morning, he asks: 'Otto, please hand me my—oh, dash it, what goes over my feet—you know—' And Karl, whom he calls Otto, said: 'You mean your boots, Captain?' And the captain says: 'Precisely, what else could I mean'?"

They condoned his annoying mannerisms, his affectations, saying that he was the best of men, that his heart was of gold. And they looked with hopeful glee for the start of a feud between him and Major Ducrel, commanding the battalion.

Ducrel was a tall, ruddy man in the early forties, matter of fact and feeling as romantic about himself as a wine-merchant about fine vintages. He had risen from the ranks, during the World War, and did not hide the fact.

The company's lieutenant, Pandrier, was also from the ranks, had served in the Legion as a private. The sub-lieutenant, whose father was a wealthy manufacturer of Northern France, did not win de Barrois' complete affection either. And while the Legionnaires, humble fellows, journeymen of war, admitted the captain immediately as one of their own, it went otherwise with the officers.

"De Barrois?" the major said bitterly to someone in strict confidence—it took fourteen hours for the youngest private to hear of it—"De Barrois? He's a fossil, and not an intelligent one. Has he ever heard of the French Revolution? He's still looking around for a lamp-post to be hanged from!"

AN IMPORTANT question was answered in the very first engagement, two months after de Barrois' arrival: He was brave.

No Legionnaire of the march battalion was ever to forget that day. Because de Barrois showed up for the first attack in full uniform, wearing a brand new kepi and white kid gloves, a fresh ribbon on his cross of the Legion of Honor, and with a gilt handle and a nickeled scabbard!

Lieutenant Pandrier, lean and brisk, with his reddish mustache bristling, voiced a protest: "Forgive me, Captain, but don't you think you'd better put a khaki cover on your kepi? And that sword—it shines, attracts attention!"

De Barrois considered him haughtily.

"My dear colleague," he said softly: "I haven't heard a bullet since 1918, so this is in a way a celebration and calls for proper dress. As for this sword, I wore it for years, through the Champagne and the Somme drives, at Verdun. I do not agree with the prevailing trend, that war is a sort of hard labor and must be carried out in overalls."

It is incredible that the Chleuh snipers, concealed in the brush along the crests, did not fail to notice him. But fate is perverse, on the battlefield as elsewhere, and bullets ignored de Barrois, leading the advance in plain sight and four to five hundred yards away, to go and slay men resting under cover a mile or more behind the front lines.

Aside from showing his courage, the old captain had proved that he knew his profession. Exposing himself, he had been very careful of his men. And they

had sensed it. Technically, he had conducted the job so that no criticism could be voiced. As a matter of fact, there was only justice in his being cited.

Those who knew claimed that Ducrel almost had a stroke when he was asked to sign the citation composed by the battalion-adjutant. But with moral courage also worthy of being mentioned, he picked up the pen that had dropped from his nerveless fingers at the first reading, and signed with a flourish, muttering:

"The damn ass!" as a consolation.

Noblesse oblige! De Barrois celebrated his citation with the officers of the battalion, and champagne was brought several times from the peddlers' carts. He also presented each man in his company—my men really did the work, don't you know?—with one quart of wine, a cigar or ten cigarettes! But it was learned very quickly, for an expeditionary column is like a small town for gossip, that he had not paid cash for anything. The peddler, coming for a settlement, had been given notes.

AS THE campaign continued, and there was time for an exchange of letters between Morocco and France, more information had come through concerning the captain, none of which subtracted anything from his picturesque character.

At the end of the World War, when he had been acting as colonel of an infantry regiment, although wearing a major's stripes, he had resigned from the army, motivating this act with an official letter to the effect that "He did not consider himself suited to obey, in peace time and without national emergency, the orders of a lawyer's government."

A careful, reasonable man, willing to cut down his standards, could have known comfort with what little remained of the family estate. But de Barrois loved luxury, preferred a piece of bread and a sardine on a gold plate to a solid meal in a plebeian earthenware dish. He was fond of ladies, fond of gambling. And, to end with, he had in effect sold his name and title to some stock brokers, who made him a member of their board of directors for the sake of their stationery. Certain investors, abroad even more than in France, felt confidence when they read: Viscount Alexandre de Barrois.

The enterprise had been investigated by the law, had collapsed. It was well known that de Barrois had no knowledge of business, that he had been deceived himself, in all probability. However, an old acquaintance, a man who had been born in a farming family on the Viscount's former properties, chanced to be high up in the government. He had moved heaven and earth to quash charges against his ancestors' liege-lord, had promised him to handle the questions of money and law, had obtained for him reinstatement into the Army.

Even at that, de Barrois had been hard to please.

"Come, come, my dear chap," he had addressed the cabinet minister, who had shined his boots when they were both small lads. "You can't imagine me in the peacetime Army of today, where name and tradition mean nothing! Mixing with the sub-prefect of a provincial town, dancing with his wife, attending bourgeois bridge parties, the tea of Madame the Colonel—"

"The Colonial Army, then?" the Minister had suggested.

"Ah, no! Nursemaid to Chinese—"

"What about the Legion?"

"The Legion? The Foreign Legion?" de Barrois' face had lighted up. "Now, my dear chap, there is a suggestion! What is the Legion except the continuation of the royal regiments, the Swiss Guard? By all means!"

And Alexandre de Barrois had started off for Morocco. He had purchased expensive baggage, a whole set of uniforms, boots from London, a liquor coffer, six new kepis—all of them charged to his "dear chap," the government official. In North Africa, he had bought three horses, where one might have done. And had his signed receipt mailed to France. Innocently, he took at the exact letter the other's promise:

"Go readjust yourself, at your real business, fighting. Leave the money worries to me."

Nearing fifty, within a few years of retirement age for captains, he was as hopeful and ambitious as a lad. Surely, when louts such as Ducrel had battalions, he, de Barrois would soon be a general. And, as he explained to his colleagues, as he wetted down his first citation "in the colonies," he had been wrong, perhaps, when he had resigned. After all, it was good for the Army to have a few career men, chaps whose ancestors had charged, laces floating over steel breastplates, with the King's household cavalry!

Prodded on by several of the officers in the gathering, De Barrois talked a great deal and drank more. He drank as well as could be expected of a very strong man with almost thirty years of experience: He tried various mixtures suggested to him: cognac and champagne, anisette and Chablis. And the most treasonable speeches were uttered that night, under the canvas, on an isolated plateau of the Moroccan mountains.

A Bourbon king was placed in Paris, in answer to the secret prayers of the people, who craved to be led by a strong hand accustomed to power. A constitution for France, of course—one could not be too backward, but nothing that would permit such extraordinary events as occurred in England, for instance.

He was dividing France into Duchies when his eyes glazed a bit, and he groped for his tunic collar. In truth, he was very drunk.

"I'm a trifle uneasy," he said, "and with your permission, I shall take leave."

THE following day, Captain de Barrois was not too well. He stood in a canvas tub, while Karl-Otto, the orderly, sluiced great buckets of cold water on his long, sinewy frame.

He had improved to the point where he was whistling a hunting song, when a liaison man arrived from the major's quarters, with an invitation to call at once.

Major Ducrel rose to greet him, shook hands limply.

"Be seated, Captain."

"Thank you, Major."

The two considered each other, like two swordsmen about to engage their steel.

"Captain de Barrois, I understand that last night, after my departure and that of the senior officers, you uttered subversive statements—"

"I, Major?" de Barrois was surprised, honestly surprised. "Subversive to what?"

"To the welfare of the State, Captain."

"You are misinformed, Major."

"I hope I am—" Ducrel consulted several sheets of paper before him: "Did you not express your belief that if France were headed by a King the nation would be much better off?"

De Barrois shrugged, smiled.

"Possibly." His eyes met those of his superior with an innocent stare: "I have a right to give my opinion, haven't I?"

"An officer should not discuss politics."

De Barrois lifted a long, muscular hand in protest.

"He should not engage in politics. There are no regulations against expressing an opinion. But enough of this, Major. I am supposed to get what our troopers would term 'a bawling out,' so I shall listen patiently, with discipline. Continue."

"It may go much further than a bawling out, Captain, I warn you—"

De Barrois retorted coldly, "Last night, we were a few officers gathered for an amusing evening. Everything discussed was presumably under the rose. What I consider much more alarming for the French Army than the political opinions of a single man is the fact that among those I treated as friends there must have been at least one spy."

"Be a bit careful of your words, Captain."

"I am being exceedingly cautious, Major. What word do you use to indicate a man who, while not protesting anything said, makes out a report to his superiors?"

"Do you realize that there are some who perhaps were offended by your statements?"

"Still, you will agree with me that it would have been better to interrupt

me than to denounce me anonymously."

"The report is signed."

"May I know by whom, Major?"

"In due time. I am considering whether I shall forward this to the general commanding the expedition. I am duty bound to do so, unless I can arrange matters satisfactorily."

"How, Major?"

"We can easily prevail upon the doctor to sign a certificate that you are incapable to continue on active service," the major said. "Back in Meknes, you can arrange for your resignation at leisure, say two or three months—"

Surprise, shock, grief, swiftly carved de Barrois' impassive face into a mask of throbbing sinews. Perspiration broke out at his temples.

"Resign? Leave my company in the middle of a campaign?"

"Come, come—" The major was aghast at the change in the captain.

"You can go to the devil, do you hear? I have come back to the army as to a refuge, the last place I could exist like a gentleman!" De Barrois shook his fist: "You cannot kick me out! Not on a trumped excuse, because I rubbed your snout in your own gutter!"

"Captain, lower your voice!"

"If I thought the Army was you, and your informers, I'd quit. But there is more to it. There is the regiment, there is my company. Go and ask them if they give a damn what my political opinions are! If I were sure you knew how to handle a sword, I'd—"

Ducrel pulled himself together with a visible effort.

"My ability as a fencer is not involved, Captain. Once more, I repeat: Instructions have been issued to report all subversive speeches. I do not wish to do it. But whether an order is pleasant or otherwise, what else can I do?"

Fortunately for de Barrois, the general in charge was a youngish man with a sense of humor. He asked a few questions of the younger officers who had participated in the now famous evening and decided to drop the matter.

When De Barrois was notified, he commented: "I thought that was a good deal of fuss over a little round of liquor."

But he did not like his superior the better for the episode.

As for the Legionnaires, the whole thing amused them: Ducrel's nightmare of a conspiracy, de Barrois' valiant stand. The veteran captain became a precious addition to the whole expedition, because he seemed guaranteed to supply gossip and amusement for idle moment.

As for Ducrel—

"Swords!" the major snorted, "If he were sure I could handle a sword! We might be living under Louis XIII, to listen to him! But we'll see, we'll see."

FATE gave Ducrel an opportunity very quickly.

A postal plane brought a batch of mail. The newspapers were read avidly. To the bulk, there was nothing important in them—the same old stories: the French cabinet had fallen, a new one had taken its place, there were two or three financial scandals, a brace of sensational murders.

It was noticed by a few that de Barrois was unusually quiet at mess, that he, who ordinarily had a robust appetite, scarcely touched his lunch. When the comments grew loud over the change in the cabinet, and his opinion was asked, he appeared embarrassed, cleaned his monocle carefully. "I really don't follow politics closely, don't you know?"

He appeared to be expecting something to happen, and it did. In mid-afternoon, he was summoned to the major's tent. To give him his due, Ducrel appeared uncomfortable, ashamed. This was scarcely the victory he had wished.

"Let's be brief, and shorten an awkward explanation, Captain. I have here a communication from the colonel commanding the regiment, transmitting to me, as formation commander for the Legion here, various complaints from tradesmen in Casablanca, Meknes, Tadla. Also from France."

"Yes, Major."

"Of course, it isn't precisely decent of merchants to go to your superiors, but they claim to have notified you or your representative several times, without receiving satisfactory replies. I must own

that some of the items are sizeable, for instance, a bill from Varin Freees, of Dar-Rashid, for some sixty thousand francs—"

De Barrois smiled wanly, coughed.

"They deal in horses, Major. My mounts were supplied by them."

"What do you intend to do about it?"

The captain spread his hands helplessly.

"My dear Major, what can I do about it—here, on active service? Can I borrow? Can I go from door to door to raise the money?"

"Still, you appear, forgive me for expressing this, to have been a bit extravagant, Captain. You could have done with one horse, or two—"

"Perhaps," de Barrois said, puzzled. "But you see, I've never owned less than three. Sort of a round number, isn't it? Now, let us understand each other: I was promised, by very influential personal acquaintance, I might almost say a friend, that my signature would be honored for all necessary expenditures connected with my return to the service. I took his promise in good faith. Of course, as soon as I have the chance, I shall go about and raise funds to pay everything."

"Your acquaintance, I judge from the information supplied me, is Monsieur Fargeais." Ducrel repressed a smile: "At latest reports, he had fled into Belgium, to avoid investigation of his activities. I very much fear that you can no longer count on him. Do you know anyone who would handle this in France, in Morocco, immediately?"

De Barrois stared into space.

"There is a chance, Major. I have a friend—we belong to the same clubs—who is a director on the Board of the *Credit Anonyme de Dordogne*—"

Ducrel consulted a sheet of a rather thick *dossier*.

"A Monsieur Casimir de Hurau?"

"Precisely."

Ducrel shook his head. "I regret to have to inform you that you must seek elsewhere. Monsieur de Hurau is threatening to place some matter or other concerned with yourself in the hands of his attorneys. I hesitate to state it so very boldly, Captain, but one derives the impression that you uttered a check without a balance. Amount," the major whispered, "one hundred and thirty-five thousand francs!"

"Ah, yes, yes," de Barrois brushed his perspiring forehead with his hands: "A gambling debt. I had an unlucky evening, Major. But see here, my friend Fargeais told me he would cover my account at once. I was leaving France, had no time for petty bookkeeping—"

"Evidently, Minister Fargeais was too occupied to remember. You then have nothing immediate to suggest?"

De Barrois shook his head.

"All my remaining property is mortgaged. I have nothing except my army pay at the moment, and even were I to go naked and without food, it would take something like a decade to settle just what you have listed. No, there is nothing I can do from here. I'd have to get to Paris, see those people personally."

"Make out an application for leave, Captain. I shall approve it, and urge the general to sign."

"I am very grateful, Major."

De Barrois retired to his tent to write his application for leave. He could board a returning plane, be in Meknes in four hours, in Paris within five days. But when he thought of the weary hours ahead when he reached there, of the interviews, the polite refusals, the rebuffs, he looked at the service revolver suspended in its shining holster from the tent pole.

"*Pardieu*, no!" he decided at last: "that's messy and a trifle too final. There is still hope."

BUT another and more immediate humiliation awaited him. As a jackal smells a carcass, the Levantine trader had scented de Barrois' disaster, and arrived at his tent with his bills. The captain did something he had never done before: He counted the bills in his wallet and the change in his pockets!

He discovered that if he paid the few hundred francs outstanding, he would not have enough for his transportation to France. But when he asked

for a delay, the trader, strong in his rights and aware that an officer dreaded scandal, started to protest loudly.

Sub-Lieutenant Mollinet, entering the tent, took in the situation at a glance: "Please allow me, Captain. Don't bother opening your trunk for money." He settled the bills, chatted aimlessly of something else.

Karl-Otto was mournfully fastening the small trunks when the major sent for de Barrois again.

He had spoken to the general, who had agreed instantly, but upon communicating with headquarters by wireless had been informed that no leave could be granted for any reason, as a decisive operation was planned within three or four days.

"Sorry, Captain," Ducrel said, "but short of explaining the entire matter almost publicly, nothing can be obtained. It does look odd for an officer to leave a few hours before a combat. But I have arranged for you to use the wireless as far as Casablanca, where your messages can be relayed. I shall ask your permission to have cable charges from Casa to Paris handled by my bankers in Morocco."

The captain uttered words of thanks, burning that he had to accept this courtesy that smacked of charity.

That he was very weary mentally, seeking an out by way of a kindly bullet, was evident.

He wore no sword in the next combat, but he took his glittering kepi into the worst of the fusillade, remaining standing, his big, aristocratic nose lifted as if seeking something in the vibrating air —one of those humming bits of metal, no larger than the tip of a man's little finger, which would put him beyond the reach of process-servers, lawyers, creditors.

Worry had blunted the keen edge of de Barrois's conceit, he had an odd, gentle manner. He fretted over the safety of others, several times warned his orderly to watch out.

"He called me Karl, my right name," the man told his friends later. "That made me feel funny. He isn't himself any more."

And no one who listened could laugh.

AT TWO o'clock in the morning preceding the decisive attack, Major Ducrel was awakened by an orderly from the chief-of-staff of the column, a lieutenant-colonel of engineers. He dressed hastily, walked through the encampment, sure that rest was ended for him for many hours: his battalion would probably be ordered away from its position, hurled in a flanking movement.

The French lines were at the foot of a range of hills, which were to be carried shortly after dawn. The outposts were in contact with the enemy.

The chief-of-staff peered at Ducrel with timid eyes.

"I have bad news for you, Major."

"If you mean my battalion has to go in at once," Ducrel said, "that isn't bad news."

"No, no—this isn't directly concerned with the operations," the engineer officer explained: "We received the news an hour ago, after the priority messages, concerning the coming engagement, had come through."

"What's the trouble?"

"You have a captain by the name of de Barrois. Alexandre de Barrois—"

"You know damn well I have," Ducrel said. "You know him yourself, mon colonel."

"Yes, yes, to be sure. Well, we are advised by Headquarters that a special dispatch has come from the Ministry of War, which has been approached by the police. Captain de Barrois is wanted as a witness in the current investigation. There is also a warrant out for his immediate arrest in the matter of a fraud with a check."

"I've been afraid of that, Colonel. You see, regimental headquarters communicated with me. What do you wish me to do?"

"Well, strictly, I should have dispatched the lieutenant of gendarmes with this column to assure himself of de Barrois' person." The chief-of-staff nodded: "But I thought it better—"

"You did right," the major said: "If you value your *gendarme*. Some of de Barrois' men would have been sure to start trouble. Well, what do you want me to do?"

"I leave it up to you, Major. Here is the message. You are his direct superior, you understand."

Ducrel saluted and returned to his tent. He had his adjutant awakened, explained the situation: "Now, you do what you think best, Captain. I wash my hands of the whole business."

The adjutant probably would have liked to pass the unpleasant decision to someone else, but he was the last in line.

"Understood, Major. I believe that an order informing Captain de Barrois that he is relieved of his command and is to consider himself under open arrest, will be sufficient."

"I'm not sure of the exact formalities in this case," Ducrel retorted, "but I believe that some mention of the charges against him is legal. One cannot yank a captain away from his company without explanation."

"Of course not, Major. However, if he gets the message say at four o'clock, the attack being scheduled for five, he may decide to ignore it. That leaves the decision up to him. I shall send a man who is intelligent and will not employ unnecessary speed."

THE company was in shallow trenches at the foot of a slope. This incline was divided by a sort of rising spine down its length, divided into two unequal parts. Sub-Lieutenant Mollinet was to take the right with one section, while the other sections went center and left. The two parts would not lose contact, as a combat group led by a smart sergeant would follow the ridge.

De Barrois had explained the situation completely, on the map, to his officers and noncoms.

Then he had slid into his blankets, inside a shallow dugout prepared by Karl. He was asleep at last.

It was after four when a runner from battalion headquarters arrived at the captain P.C. False dawn was whitening the sky over the hills. And in the dim light, the men on watch stirred as he passed, grotesque, huddled shapes.

"Captain de Barrois, Captain de Barrois?"

"Here," Karl said, rising. He had been asleep six feet from his commander. "I'll give it to him when he wakes up."

"Nothing doing, Karl. Got to deliver it to him."

"The one time when he gets off to sleep and you've got to come and gum the works—" Karl walked toward his chief, rested a gentle hand on his shoulder: "Captain, eh, Captain—liaison."

"Eh? What?" The captain sat up, yawned. "What is it, Otto? Oh, liaison, of course—Thank you, my friend, thank you. The torch, Karl—"

He read the note, read it again. He looked up at the liaison runner.

"All right, Legionnaire. There's no answer. Karl!"

"Captain—"

"Fetch Lieutenant Pandrier at once."

Others heard the request, and the word was passed along that an immediate attack was due—else why would the lieutenant be needed at once? Pandrier was brought back from a position somewhat in advance of the line, where he had been on watch with an automatic rifle gang.

"Anything new, Captain?"

"Yes. You're in command of the company, Pandrier."

"I, Captain? I don't understand—"

"I am relieved of my command, that's all."

"What's wrong, Captain?"

"Nothing important, nothing you need be concerned about." De Barrois hesitated, then resumed: "I no longer give orders, but may I offer a suggestion?"

"Please, Captain."

"There's an open stretch on the left, which may prove hard to cross. That was to be your job. Better put Mollinet at it now, and place a good sergeant—Lebuch, perhaps—on the right. There the advance will be pretty well protected by brush and stones. I meant to bear a bit left with the center as we neared the position. Needless to go to it headlong."

"I'll remember, Captain."

"You may leave, Lieutenant." Then de Barrois hoisted himself erect a bit stiffly, offered his hand: "Naturally, the best of luck. Sorry I had to drop out." He looked at his watch: "Damn me, I

believe I shall stay and see you off—"

WHEN the lieutenant had left, de Barrois sat down on his blankets again. And weary minutes stretched into an hour, into the next. The sky reddened, and the whole earth seemed to sigh: Day was breaking.

"Karl!" de Barrois said suddenly.

"Captain?"

"Have you ever been to jail, to prison —I mean, outside the army?"

"Lots of times, Captain."

"How is it?" the captain wondered.

"Not bad, sometimes. It's like the Legion, depends where you are, how you eat, how you're treated." Karl laughed: "Captain, you know I've had some pretty good times in the can? Taking it easy, eating good, resting. I suppose it's all in what you've been used to. For instance, it's no place for a real gentleman or an officer."

"It isn't, is it, Karl?" de Barrois mused for a long time. The Legionnaires were awake all along the line, making the last preparations in leisurely fashion. Hot coffee had been brought up. The captain accepted a cup, drained it. "Karl, do you like this watch?"

"Swell, Captain. I've noticed it before. Must be worth five thousand francs, eh?"

"You keep it."

"Oh, no, Captain—"

"Keep it."

Whistles shrilled in the distance; the shots were increasing. Karl, who was buckling on a watch, heard a detonation very near. He looked down, and saw that his captain was stretched out, but did not realize what had occurred until he saw the gray smoke lifting from the service revolver in his hand, in a long twirl from the muzzle, in a dim mist from the cylinder. Foolishly, he bent down and picked up the gun.

"Get the lieutenant," some one said.

Pandrier arrived, buckling on an extra sack of grenades as he walked. He looked at de Barrois for a moment, grew very pale. Then he turned to Karl: "Stay here with him, see that he is picked up. I've got to go now."

He raced back to the center of the company. The men, their eyes straining ahead, had noticed nothing. Young Mollinet, running up for a last word, knew only that Pandrier was to lead.

He brought the metal whistle to his lips, blew sharply. And walked ahead, dragging the long, supple khaki files behind him, into the open. Here he was, Pandrier, born on a farm, drafted into the army, volunteer for the Legion, officer after seventeen years of service, Legion of Honor, a pension—a family to go back to.

Lucky, very lucky, compared to that poor old fool back there, with the hole in his head, just above, just ahead of his right ear. Viscount Alexandre de Barrois, who had commanded a regiment before the European enemy, Legion of Honor, man of wealth, who had died like a mad dog—forbidden to fight!

Then the combat caught him in its meshes, and he forgot everything. Everything but the connecting group of the ridge, where the sergeant signaled from time to time that the right section was in sight and progressing satisfactorily.

The Chleuhs were drawing back, most of them. The old man had known the trade, Pandrier thought; the tactics he had proposed brought the attacking groups in the lee of a low rise of ground. Pandrier could see the Chleuhs' bullets smashing on the crest, could hear them whine as they ricochetted through the sunlight.

They had enough, ahead, were beginning to retreat. It was as good as over with now. The natives had made excellent time; the slope was as bare of life as the palm of one's hand.

PANDRIER considered the space ahead, looked at his watch: He was on time. He placed his automatics at spots decided upon in advance, and shook his head when a sergeant asked him whether they were to dig in.

It was still quite early, there would be another advance, so why fatigue men needlessly?

Pandrier walked to the left, until Sergeant Lebuch came to meet him.

"Much breakage?" he asked.

"Three wounded, Lieutenant. Two of them walking cases. But—" Lebuch seemed to worry about his short mustache, touched it with a finger's tip—"The captain contrived to get killed, Lieutenant."

"I know all about that," Pandrier said: "Sad business."

Lebuch nodded, extended his hand:

"We left him there, where he fell, Lieutenant."

"What? Where?"

"Right there, Lieutenant."

Lebuch led the way a few yards to one side, and there, sure enough, was the captain. At least, there were his fancy boots jutting from beneath a tent canvas. Bewildered, the officer stared at the sergeant.

"But, see here—"

"It happened so quickly that none of us could intervene, Lieutenant. The captain, like all of us, thought it was over, and he sort of stopped to draw breath, took off his kepi to wipe the lining. He was standing right here, you see, on this little rock, with the bushes all around. Then one of the slobs came up from the bottom of the rock, where he'd hid himself, just extended his hand, and fired. The captain didn't have time to say 'oof!'"

"You don't tell me?"

"It's just as I'm telling you, Lieutenant. Karl and another guy got the fellow right away. There he is—"

Pandrier stepped toward the body, looked down into the contorted, bearded face.

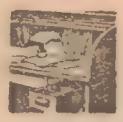
"He used a pistol, Lieutenant, tossed it away as he started to run. We've looked for it, and we'll find it—"

"I dare say you will, if you look hard enough." Pandrier scratched his chin.

Other Legionnaires had straggled near, stood around the sergeant, to give him moral support. Lebuch was uneasy, his face was tense, but he was stubborn.

Pandrier swept the faces around him with a rapid glance. They looked like a gang of fanatics. They *believed* that Captain de Barrois had *walked* to his death at the hand of an enemy, like a gentleman. The officer nodded briefly.

"I get it, yes."



NEVERTHELESS, as a commissioned officer does not have the same latitude in the interpretation of his duties as a sergeant, Pandrier decided to consult Major Ducrel before writing out his report.

As he had told Lebuch, he, Pandrier, understood perfectly well why the Legionnaires had carried the captain's body up the hill, under fire, to fake his death in action.

Ducrel scowled as he listened.

"So, they'll give me a lesson, show me they sided with him! They're not so clever, the lot of them. An investigation will blow things wide open. Oh, I know what was said, that I was trying to force him out because he had made cracks about rankers. But they don't know the fact that for a week past I could have relieved him of command, that I tried to help him. We'll see—"

The captain-adjutant, who was present, spoke up gently.

"You felt as they did, Major."

"Why—eh, so I did!"

"And it's much better for the battalion to have a captain killed in action than a suicide or the central figure in a scandal."

"Yes, yes. Poor devil." He grinned. "The sentimental swine. They think they've put something over on me, do they? Well, I'll go them one better. Try a bit of style on a posthumous citation, Captain. Something neat, heartfelt!"

The officer wrote silently for some minutes, then read off the lines he had covered:

"DE BARROIS—(Alexandre-Charles-Dagobert) captain in March Battalion of Foreign Legion with the mobile group: Veteran officer, of an old and illustrious family. At the attack of the Jebel-Maskri, his courage and scorn of danger was an inspiration to all. Died heroically—"

The toneless voice droned on, tolling off glittering, flaming words, a superb citation—won, in reality, by Lebuch, Karl the orderly, and the men of the right section, true to the traditions of faith and comradeship that are all a modern world has left for them.

There was a mighty toughness of age in those muscles.

OLD GUS GOES SWILIN'

By BERT SHURTLEFF

THE salt water ice in St. Johns harbor, so thick that there had been pung races on it, had been groaning and grinding for three days now with the threat of departure. In spite of this unmistakable sign of spring it had been snowing all day.

Soft and fine, the delicate white had blanketed the ugliest of the waterfront. The great pile of scrap iron on one of the wharves took on a feathery delicacy that belied both the harshness of the rusted red beneath and the grim destiny for which the metal was now assigned in European munition shops.

Lying partially in the lee of that pile, a snow-mantled huddle resembled nothing more than the form of an Eskimo

husky, a faint curl of rising steam from the breath hole and the mild heave of laboring lungs being the only signs that life lurked beneath.

Toward dusk the huddle stirred. Heaving, unwinding, stretching, it reared far too high to be even a giant husky and shook itself violently to rid itself of the clinging snow. It might have been a bear, as far as any observer could have told before the crusted snow began to fall away from bushy eyebrows and walrus mustaches to reveal a pair of rheumy blue eyes, and patches of ruddy skin nipped bright by the chill covering.

Then the continued shaking revealed a heavy pea jacket such as sailors wear in bitter weather and a pair of sodden and shapeless old woolen trousers.

"Ol' Goos," muttered the grinning lips, as one gnarled hand broke the crust away from the drooping mustache, "you got to get somet'ing more to keep you varm or you freeze to deat' here."

Weaving and blinking, but grinning at the half forgotten memory of a night of wassail that had ended with his going to sleep by the pile of junk, old Gus felt in his pocket with stiff fingers. Not a single coin rewarded his searching of the folds, not the faintest rustle of a single bill. Except for lint and scraps of tobacco and his pipe, his pockets were empty.

But old Gus managed a chuckle as he lifted his head to peer from under jutting eyebrows toward the nearby harbor. Already there was a black crack across the ice. Then he blinked incredulously.

Directly in his vision steam was jetting from a steamer that had been frozen fast these many weeks of his isolation in the frozen port. Smoke was rising from her rusty stack and there was unaccustomed action on her deck and the neighboring wharf.

When money was gone there remained but one recourse to Gus. He must get himself a ship and go to sea to reline his pockets. But hitherto St. Johns, gripped in the throes of winter, had offered no such opportunity.

Grinning at his good fortune in waking so near a vessel, he shuffled hurriedly along the waterfront after other hurrying forms that seemed to be converging on the old steamer. Reaching the wharf he responded to the bawled cry of, "Line up wid dese men yere if you wants to ship. Keep de line strite, men. No shovin' in."

THE OLD sailor grinned at the lubberly looks of the men around him. Clearly these Newfies did not look like sailors. Fishermen they might be, lobstermen, traulers, seiners, hook-and-liners, but no sailors. Any mate worth his salt would be able to spot a real sailor in such a gang. He should have no trouble signing on.

Then a slight worry assailed him. They had already hired more than enough men to handle such a vessel, since he took his place at the foot of the line, yet they were still hiring. The decks looked for all the world as if this was an army transport, but they kept on sending more men with their duffle aboard.

"I guess dey don' take we," sighed a broad-shouldered oaf just ahead of the old man. "Maybe we got to ship wid dat udder outfit. I gif' half me earnin's to go wid dis skipper."

The odd lingo of the natives was too much for the old man. Although he was distantly related to their ancestors by race, being a Swede himself, he was too tired to make any sense of the bantering.

"Vhere ve goin' dis trip?" he ventured, poking the broad back ahead of him.

"Vhere de swiles is, you bloomin' square-head," snorted the other without turning around. "Leastways dats vhere us'n's goes. I don' know does dey take you."

A boy just ahead of Gus was thrust aside, the mate's head shaking.

"No place for de likes of you on de ice. Grow into a man does you want us to take you."

"But I'm goin' on fifteen. I c'n pull an oar wid de bes' an' pack a bar'l o' flour home on me back," protested the lad, almost in tears.

But the mate's head continued to shake and his big mittened hands thrust the lad aside and reached for the broad-shouldered chap in front of Gus.

"Back again, eh, Blue-Nose? Reckoned you was lost coddin'. Git aboard dere und get ready for some real swilin'."

The piercing eyes squinted at old Gus and the head started to shake.

"No use, you're too old for dis game. You couldn' club, skin, nor haul. Jumpin' de ice would wear out dem sprung old legs und we got to stop to clout you up in canvas und say a prayer over what's left. Out of de line und let de men swing along."

Bewildered by the words that were strange to him, the old man blinked and the smile died upon his lips.

"I'm a sailor man," he declared. "I can stan' my trick in any kin' o' veader und do my share o' de vork vid any of de young vuns. Yoost give me a chance und I show you who can yoomp."

A mittened hand caught him by the shoulder, propelled him to one side. A well aimed kick landed on his rump and sent him sprawling. The men guffawed and passed on, heedless of the worry in those rheumy old eyes as Gus wearily picked himself up and started back to argue.

It was not the first time he had been passed over of late for younger men. Often he had been forced to argue with shipping agency or doubting officer to secure a berth. But there was no arguing with this dictator. He pointed every remark with another of those shoves and another mighty kick that carried the decrepit form farther and farther at each attempt.

After the fourth ignominious trip at the urge of that vicious boot, the old man shook his head. He managed a chuckle in spite of his worry and called in a cracked voice, "I t'ink you don' know a goot man vhen you see vun, you brass button monkey. Joost for dat I got a goot min' not to sail vid you."

The men laughed at that and even the sour visaged mate, pretending to lunge after him again, chuckled in spite of himself.

BUT the mate was not chuckling four hours later as the old steamer shunted her way through the drifting ice, battering out of the harbor toward the open sea and the ice floes where they sought the hair seals with their thick coats of fat. Tired with the mighty task of getting the ship ready for sea, of stowing sufficient provisions for a two or three month trip, of signing on not only a crew but enough seal hunters to insure a cargo of fat sculps if they found the herds, he was in no mood to turn out and search ship for possible stowaways.

But the second engineer was adamant. He fairly bristled as he thrust his chin forward.

"I tell you, Mister Mate," he insisted, "there's somethin' in one of de ventilators. I cleaned dem all out today an' it mus' be a stowaway. I want you got to go wid me."

"Stowaways?" rasped the Old Man, glowering at the mate. "I told you to search ship just before we pulled out."

"I did, sir. I'll take my oath—"

But the engineer had darted to the suspected ventilator and had ducked head and shoulders into its funnel mouth.

He backed out slowly, plainly laboring to drag something after him. There came protesting noises from the funnel, the thump of kicking feet, then a rasping voice.

"Yoost leave me alone und I come out. You don' have to pull me. I hate de smell of your ol' tub an' be glad to git ashore."

The mate stiffened as the second backed away and the thin form of old Gus came thrusting uncertainly from the funnel.

"I fin' de oder ship yoost as bad as yours," grinned the old sailor, waving affably at the scowling giant. "I got no money, so I got to have a job. A man's got to eat, even if you don' know a sailor vhen you see vun."

"You get nothin' here but seal flippers, you useless old bag of bones," roared the mate, his face purple. "If you don' make yourself useful, once we hit de ice, you don' get efen dem."

Old Gus stared, his eyes blinking. Slowly his predicament dawned upon him. This was no ordinary trip on which he had stowed away. This was a sealing venture, an undertaking that he had

always considered far lower than fishing and far more disgraceful for a seafaring man. But the rafting ice behind him would not afford safe escape to shore, and the inhospitable land offered no assurance of even seal flippers to allay his growing hunger, so old Gus accepted his lot as philosophically as he could and shuffled about to find a place where he might sleep.

This was no easy matter, for there were so many men crowded aboard the steamer that he felt sure they must lie down by shifts. But his persistence had won him a way into the hearts of the men who had seen him return for those rebuffs at the hands and feet of the mate. Ready grins and loud guffaws welcomed him. Men shared their blankets and their food with him. He was early initiated into the most surprising life he had ever encountered on shipboard.

Among the sealers there were two sharp distinctions. The killers, or clubbers, were aloof from the skinners, since the success of the voyage must depend on the speed and agility of these men who were to go galloping over the ice to dispatch the helpless seals. Anybody might flench the sculp off, once the beast was dead, or drag the fatty burden back across the ice to the ship or to the big pan where a collection of sculps would be made for the ship to bunt its way nearer through the ice to swing the pile into the holds, but it took skill and daring to be a killer.

Yet they fraternized after a fashion, for each killer must have his own skinners and there must be some harmony between them. Aboard the ship, killers and skinners were alike exempt from duties, other than to prepare their own meals and entertain themselves and each other as best they might without getting in the way of the men who must handle the ship.

Ready with an infinite store of anecdotes of his experiences on sea and shore, full of bubbling humor, quick to tell a joke on himself, he regaled them with his experiences in the far corners of the world while the old ship plowed her way through cold seas, bumped through rafted ice, and surged forward night and day in quest of the herds that would be working back soon toward northern waters.

THEN, suddenly, they were among the seals.

The excitement and activity left old Gus bewildered at first. As the cry lifted, the ship was suddenly all activity. The killers seized their poles and crowded to the rails, closely followed by skinners with tow ropes wrapped about their waists and keen knives ready in the sheaths at their belts. Then the ship ground against ice, and men spewed overside in a sudden flow of floundering, cheering, eager life.

In less than a minute the decks were cleared of everybody but the staring Gus and the men required to work the ship. Out across the ice, led by the nimblest killers, the horde of men were running and leaping to get at those sleeping figures that indolently raised their heads to stare without fear at the approaching death.

Then, before the first club lifted to smack down upon an unresisting head, a mighty fist grabbed old Gus by one shoulder and another mighty clutching hand caught him by the seat of the trousers. With a lift and a heave from behind he was carried swiftly to the rail and hurled ignominously overboard to land in a heap on the ice below.

"Get out dere and earn your salt, you ol' scarecrow," roared the mate after him. "Shake dem bones alive. Git out your knife and skin dem seals or I skin you wid a rope's end. We got no room nor no meals for sojers aboard dis packet."

A well aimed squirt of tobacco juice from the deck sent Gus scrambling out of range. The sudden appearance of a rifle in the mate's arms sent the old sailor running, panting, slipping, and sliding after the sealers.

Clubs flailed ahead of him. Lifted seal heads took the blows and dropped. The idling bodies, caught out of their element, flopped helplessly on the ice. Blood spattered.

Everywhere along the whole front of that resting herd the men were busy killing and skinning. Knives flashed in

the sunlight. The freshly slaughtered bodies steamed in the chill air as expert blades opened the tough skin and turned back the thick layers of oily fat that would eventually find its way into various commercial uses.

Gus, panting and puffing from the exertion and the terror of the unaccustomed leaping over the black gaps of water that separated the white rafts of ice, eventually reached one of the friendly souls who had shared food and blankets with him. Already besmirched with the blood and grease of several victims he had skinned, the man made a hurried effort to initiate old Gus in the task of skinning, but gave it up when he saw how awkward the unaccustomed hands were.

"You haul dem sculps to de bigges' pan aroun' here and leave we to kill und skin dem swiles," he called, waving to indicate what he meant. Then he showed Gus how to make his tow rope fast to some three or four of the fatty skins and how to haul them along the ice to the large pan where they could be safely piled.

Old Gus worked at this with a will. His arms and legs and back might look skinny, but there was a mighty toughness of age in those muscles that had been built at countless hours of heaving on rope and sail and windlass and at scampering up and down ratlines in all kinds of weather.

With a shuffling gait, peculiar to himself, that looked slow but somehow covered the ice quickly, he kept those steaming sculps gliding toward the pan as fast as three of the best skinners in the crowd could tear them from the warm quivering bodies. Great streaks of red told where he had dragged each burden as the killing went farther and farther from the pan and the ship came bunting its way down to the cached sculps to swing them aboard.

But long before the ship reached that pan, Gus was gone on to another. Behind him a red flag was standing up on a short pole at the apex of the pile of sculps to attract the attention of the ship.

Perspiring, even though he had thrown off his great pea jacket, gasping, panting, he heaved and sagged and shuffled along, bending even farther for the pull as he started another burden sliding after him.

He leaped across threatening gaps with an agility that fear inspired, dragging the sculps across with a mighty yank or hand-over-hand that had brought in many a line to snug down thrashing canvas. Except when he was facing an extra wide gap, or felt a smaller cake sinking sickeningly under him, necessitating a spurt for more solid ice, he grinned and chuckled.

The killers scattered, each followed by his skinners and his more humble haulers, who piled sculps in as large numbers as possible. The killer whom Gus was helping ran faster and farther than any of the others, the trail of battered and twitching bodies stretching out behind him as he galloped and leaped and skidded his way farther and farther from the ship.

It became a great game to Gus. With an almost childish delight in everything but the cracks and the leaps, he went hurrying after his fellow workers. Their harrying only made him chuckle all the harder in an effort to stay on their tails.

"Get a viggle on or I yoost have to set down und vait for you." he would gasp, his lungs aching with the bitter cold of the air he must inhale in mighty gasps. "I yoomp right in und help you tear deir yackets off if you don' keep me goin'. Ve got to get our share of dem seal killed und skinned und piled for de ship or dat mate don' efen feed me de flippers."

"Go on, you old crow bait," they jeered in return. "Keep away from dem cracks or you slip right t'rough to Davey Jones, you so skinny. If you feel you'self goin' down, hang onto your rope and pull dem sculps nearer, so you can wrap your arm' aroun' dem, you old bag of bones, or you nefer come up."

Gus only grinned and trotted after more sculps. His breath was wheezing and his heart was pounding away madly, but he paid no attention to either. His utter ignorance of his own body made him ignore danger signals.

"You a good vun, Svede," called somebody, "on'y you got to git a viggle on

or ve sen' home for a voman to haul dem sculp."

GUS reared his head from the swift knotting as he bent over sculps that steamed with escaping body heat. His heavy brows drew together with a twinge at the thought that these men considered him an outlander.

"Lis'n, you Newfie," he roared, "Vhere I come from in Sveden dis is yoost child play. Oop dere ve get it real col' sometimes, but ve nefer freeze." The skinner was swinging his arms and stamping his feet to renew circulation. "On'y dem blue-nosers from Newf'n'lan' is sof' enough to min' dis veader."

Henry snorted.

"Dat name ain't fer we, squarehe't," he growled.

Gus chuckled and gave the line a tug to make sure the sculps did not freeze fast to the ice under them.

"I chase dis blue nose feller down," grinned Gus, "und fin' out vhere he lif'. Boston say he come from Maine. Maine say he is a P.I. from dat Prince Edvard Island. But dem P.I. feller say dey is Newfies. I t'ink dey right. You Newfies don' move fas' enough to keep de red blood in your nose."

He chuckled and bent to the pull. Behind him Henry flourished his skinning knife and roared. "Nobody callin' men from Newf'n'lan' blue nosers aroun' me. A blue noser, you squarehe't fool, come from Labrador, vhere dey get deir noses blue from goin' coddin' and hallibutin' in de col'. You call me a Newfie, does you want to, but nobody calls we blue nosers or I fights him."

Gus chuckled when he came back again. His eyes twinkled from under the shaggy brows.

"Newfie, dem Labrador feller yoost whisper to me dat dey ain' blue nosers down dere," he called softly, heaving three sculps together for the hitch.

"Vell, you better not say us'n's is or you got to fight we."

Gus chuckled again. "You know vhat Labrador say? He tell me de real blue noser come from Icelan'."

Henry favored him with a sour look and he slogged off again.

"You know vhat dat Icelander feller yoost tell me?" he called, the next time he came near the laboring Henry. "He tol' me dat Labrador vas wrong. He say dem real blue nosers is noddin' but Nort' Pole Eskimo."

But old Gus was tiring in spite of his brave efforts not to show his weariness. His cracked old voice lifted in faint wheezes and gasps that defied the element with his battle song:

Ten t'ousan' Svedes
Yoomped out of de veeds
At de battle of Copenhagen."

Then he improvised freely to suit the occasion:

"Ten t'ousan' skins
Und flappin' fins
Und efer on we goes-es.
Svede's nose is red
As rose, I said,
But Newfies got blue noses."

His shoulders sank lower and lower at each haul. His tired eyes looked back across those gently heaving miles of gleaming ice toward the ship. Flapping above those red piles of raw sculps, the little red flags looked ridiculous to him. Certainly anybody should be able to spot those red heaps, or to trace the skidding journeys of those many loads that had left their bloody trail across the intervening ice.

In his weariness he resented all those bodies quivering and floundering ahead, where his killer still continued to club and run and club again. He resented those driving skinners with their flashing speed and their ever insistent banter that tried to get even more work from his weary old limbs. But most of all just now he resented the half dozen markers that he must still lug with him from the pile he had just completed and marked.

Their weight would have been nothing when he was fresh, but they seemed an intolerable and utterly useless burden now.

"Come on, get de lead out of dem pants. You dyin' on us, like de mate say you vould, you ol' rooster?"

He scuffed onward, barely clearing the crack he jumped, sliding, weary, gasping.

Again he bent to tie that tow rope to fresh sculps, aware that the number ahead was increasing rapidly.

Utterly unaware that he was the only hauler on the floe who did not require frequent aid from his skinners, he bent blindly to the task, wondering through the dull haze that befogged his brain if the ship could possibly swing all those panned sculps aboard and reach him on this distant portion of the floe before he collapsed from exhaustion and died of the increasing cold.

Bent to his work, he did not see that the sun was gone and the sky rapidly clouding over. Even the chill whip of the wind failed to reach him with any hint of danger.

Faint and far across the ice the dread call came wafting, picked up by the first to hear it and sent weirdly moaning on and on by voice after voice, "Sn-o-o-o-w! Sn-o-o-o-w! Sn-o-o-o-w! M-a-a-ke for de sh-i-i-i-p!"

The killer halted with club in air and wheeled to stare. The skinners stopped their flashing knives to squint into that dull haze to windward. Aware of the great danger involved, they lifted to their feet to peer back toward where the ship had been in sight.

Something that looked like a thin layer of her smoke wafted toward them across the heaving ice with its glaring white interlaced with the bloody paths where countless sculps had been dragged to the pans. But experienced sealers knew that this was not smoke. The ship and the more distant forms on the ice were lost to view—it was something far more dreaded than smoke that had hidden them.

A blizzard was swooping toward them, its gray wall wiping out the scene of carnage and concealing them from ship and fellows.

As each sealer made sure that he had seen and heard aright, he too lifted that mournful cry that rang like the howl of a dog on the rising wind, "Sn-o-o-o-w! Sn-o-o-o-w! M-a-a-ake for de sh-i-i-p!"

One of the skinners ran near the bent old form of the laboring Gus. He cupped his hands and shouted that danger cry of the ice.

Old Gus, unable to distinguish the words, his senses dulled by fatigue, his mind utterly free of any warning from tales such as the sealers had heard from childhood of men lost on the ice in a blizzard to be recovered, if at all, only as frozen corpses, thought it another of those taunts. The clubber ran past with the same cry, stopping to add, "Hurry up, ol' man. You ain't got all night!"

Gus did not even lift his head to answer. Deep in his throat rumbled a new verse of the battle song that always served to keep him going when things grew hard:

"Ten t'ousan' sculps
Dat ol' ship gulps
Und still de killer kill 'um.
Dis time I t'ink
De ol' ship sink
For sure ve goin' to fill 'um."

THE snow howled nearer. Blinking and shuffling onward, his eyes on the ice and the cracks he must jump, old Gus was barely aware of its arrival. Red blots had been swimming before his eyes for fully an hour now, born of utter fatigue such as a wiser man would have recognized and grudgingly submitted to. He only noted now that white ones were added to the color pattern.

But when he found that little drift of newly fallen flakes in the lee of the next sculp he bent to tie, he stared incredulously.

"Vhat you t'ink of dat? She mus' be snowin'" he called. "Hurry up, you Newfie loafers, or ve don' get enough seal skinned to fill dat ship."

There bein' no answer, he added with a chuckle, "Dis turn your noses blue for fair."

When he lifted his head to see why there was no answer, half expecting to find the big Henry menacing him with his knife, he thought at first that he had gone blind, and regretted all the bad whiskey he had consumed in his long career. Then he saw that it was only a blinding, driving, swirling, dashing, whining smother of falling snow that

hemmed him into an utter isolation.

Nowhere was there any of the men who had been working beside him so short a while before. Not a sign of them showed through the gray blanket that the elements had draped around him.

He straightened and floundered a few steps toward a vague shape, wondering what could have felled the massive Henry that he lay so lifeless. Then he saw that it was only a dead seal.

All of those huddles were dead seals, the red splotches of their spattered blood and the red tracks that he had made of their companions' coverings quickly disappearing under the sudden snow.

For an instant panic seized him. He was alone with the dead seals on the vast heaving sea of ice, with darkness descending rapidly and the wind and snow howling and wailing at his chilling body. His pea coat, which might have kept him warm against those icy blasts, was miles behind him.

Then he chuckled at the trick they were playing on him. These Newfies were getting even with him for kidding them about their noses. At any minute they would heave into sight and have the laugh on him for the scare they had given him.

Snow froze on his lids. The red path into which he floundered was rapidly disappearing under gathering flakes.

At the pile of gently steaming sculps he paused and listened. He could hear nothing but the wail of the wind.

"Maybe dey gone back to de ship," he muttered, recalling a scrap of the clubber's urge to hurry. "I can' hear nobody laughin' nor even dem engynes thrummin'."

Reluctantly he lifted cupped hands. Unwilling to make a laughingstock of himself, he lowered them twice without shouting, but the tick and drive and wail finally made him lift them again.

"He-e-ey, you blue nosers," he called. "Vhere's your ship? You t'ink ol' Goos vork forefer?"

The ice seemed to echo him tauntingly and then the ticking and the howling buried the faint reverberation. Except for the noises of the storm there was silence and loneliness in every direction.

Gus shuddered and tried to orient himself. The wind eddied and whirled. He could not determine in what direction the ship had lain when last he saw her, told himself that even if he could remember, even if he knew exactly where she lay this minute, he could not hope to find her. If the driving wind had not spread the great cakes far enough apart to create great cracks into which he must plunge to his death as he fought blindly to windward with his head down to keep his eyes from being snowed shut, he had not enough strength left in his tired body to cover that slippery, heaving, wind-swept stretch that led on and on to a safety that he could never attain.

Slowly he worked to the edge of the big pan. Bent against the wind, he stood at the heaving edge, where ice ground against ice with a threatening, crunching sound as the edges wore away in the rising swell.

A chill went through his old frame. He could not muster even the familiar words of his battle song now. For the first time in his long life he felt that he was beaten, he was to ride out into the great unknown even as his Viking forefathers had ridden, only his craft was to be an ice pan instead of a sailing vessel and he was to have with him only those hundred or so greasy coverings of the hair seals instead of the furs and armor that the dead Vikings wore.

BACK aboard the ship men converged through the smother upon her welcome shape. Company after company of killers heard that welcome blast of the horn that the wind swept away from old Gus. Company after company boarded her to aid in the hurried rush to get the piles of sculps aboard before the pans carrying them might break or drift away.

The stragglers kept coming in answer to that infrequent braying and the stabbing gleam of the searchlight, which was probing the falling snow for more and more of those tiny bits of flapping red that alone marked the snow-encrusted piles.

The old ship, built to stand such work, battered and churned her way steadily

onward. Weary hands swung in the sculps. Searching eyes located another and another flag.

"All your men aboart?" demanded the captain, gruffly, aware that death lurked out there beyond the stab of the light.

"I check up on dem," grunted the mate. "I t'ink dey all aboart."

"Where's French Bay Jules?"

"Where's One-Thumb Bob?"

"Dey on de pan, hookin' to dem sculp she hoistin' aboart."

Man after man was questioned. Each clubber was like a petty officer accounting for his squad.

"You all here?"

Invariably the answer was a swing to count noses, a relieved nod.

"But where's dat ol' Swede?" called Henry.

The inquiry wafted over the ship from mouth to mouth. Relieved laughter died on their lips as the cry passed from stem to stern.

"We got to fin' he," insisted Henry, scowling out toward the blinding white.

ALL through the night men strained their eyes into the gloom. When the snow ceased at last they went overboard, roped together to insure safety if anybody should tumble into a crack, and searched far and wide. Feet and hands wiped snow from every huddled figure, worried eyes relieved to find nothing but the bare body of a flenched seal beneath. Then heads lifted and weary feet moved off to where another and another little figure formed a shelter behind which snow banked in a wind shaped pile.

The piles of sculps were all but exhausted when keen eyes finally located that little patch of red defiantly flapping and whipping far off across the pans. Tired men started on the run. The old steamer seemed to quicken her pace as she bunted and thumped after them.

But when the ship arrived a discouraged group of men were sitting on the edges of that pile that had long ago ceased to steam as the snow formed into ice over the blood and grease.

"I like to find he und read out of de Good Book over he," sighed Henry. "He de bes' man on de ice what I nefer see outside of a natural born Newfie sealer."

"But he called we blue nosers," said another resentfully.

Sadly they began breaking out the stiff sculps and tumbling them into the slings that were spread to receive their fatty burden. Sculp after sculp was peeled away and slapped onto the hemp mesh. The pile rapidly diminished.

"Efen if he did call we blue nosers, he work like a man," declared Henry.

He bent and seized another greasy sculp, heaving it from its fellows. Being lower in the pile, where some of the warmth had been held by that thick covering of sculp upon sculp, the fatty coat did not tear with a frosty rip from the fellow beneath. Instead it came away with an ease that startled Henry and nearly tumbled him over backward. Something heaved erect from beneath it.

With a scream of terror Henry and his companions leaped backward, as if half expectant that the seals they had butchered might have an avenging spirit hidden in their freezing coats. But the blood-smeared, shambling thing that floundered toward them was no spirit.

The face split into a wide grin. The old eyes twinkled through the mask of grease and blood.

"Vhat keepin' you so long?" wheezed old Gus. "I t'ink you nefer comin' vid my breakfast, you lazy good-for-noddin' bunch o' Newfie blue nosers."

Henry dropped the sculp, doubled his mighty fists, and let out an angry roar. But many hands seized him, dragged him back. Many voices lifted in a clamor.

"What do we care what he call we? Leave de furriner be, Henry. Blesst if he ain' a man!"

Old Gus, catching sight of the glowering mate at the rail, allowed that grin to widen.

"You gif' me a drink of vhiskey," he roared, "and I show you. By yiminy, vid a drink o' vhiskey Gus is more dan a man." His grin widened even more. "You know, if I get two drinks of vhiskey I t'ink I turn into vun of dem ol' sockdologers of a regular Newfie blue noser myself."

Close to Death

by Major Calvin Brooks Carter

They massacred the entire detachment.

A FACT STORY

JUAN BAYOT, a Christian Filipino, was in 1924, a deputy governor in the Province of Cotabato, Philippine Islands, stationed in the town of Parang; and when the school teacher at the little Moro village of Bugasan notified him that the school needed repairing he ordered Datu Santiago, the feudal chief of that section, to make the necessary replacements. This was entirely legal, since the law in the Philippines requires every able-bodied citizen to pay a *cedula* (poll) tax, or, in lieu thereof, to work so many days on public projects.

Santiago refused to do this work without pay, and Governor Bayot, with a constabulary detachment of a native officer and six men marched to the village, some ten miles from Parang, and threatened to tie the *datu* up if he did not comply with the order.

A Moro *datu* considers himself of royal blood and is one of the proudest humans in existence. In order to save himself from such an indignity and consequent loss of prestige among his people Santiago agreed, apparently gracefully, to repair the school house roof.

Governor Bayot, the school teacher, and the constabulary detachment went to the school building to wait while the Moros were cutting the needed grass from a nearby field. The soldiers leaned their rifles against the wall on one side of the building and rested within easy reach of them.

When Datu Santiago and his men arrived they carried large bundles of long grass tied around the middle with bejuca, and each man had his *kris* concealed in his bundle.

They also brought large baskets of papayas, bananas, and other native tropical fruits, which they placed on the floor near the wall opposite to where the constabulary had leaned their guns, and asked the soldiers to help themselves. The invitation was readily accepted, the rifles being left where they were. The Moros, with the exception of the chief, had already started to work on the roof.

As soon as the men had opened their bundles of grass and recovered the *krises* Santiago gave the signal, whereupon they dropped from the roof to the floor and massacred the entire detachment, including Bayot and the school teacher, with the exception of one soldier who jumped from a window and escaped. Not one man reached his rifle; but the lieutenant, who was wearing his revolver, fought bravely, killing two Moros after he had been mortally wounded.

Three hundred of the constabulary, under command of Colonel Ole Waloe, and one hundred and fifty scouts, under Major Alan Fletcher, were dispatched to the vicinity of Bugasan and began the hunt to locate Datu Santiago and his followers; but they were somewhere in the mountain fastnesses and had no desire to fight against such odds.

MAJOR GENERAL LEONARD WOOD was governor of the Philippine Islands at this time, having been appointed to this position shortly after the inauguration of President Harding. He had seen prior service in the Philippines as governor of the Moro Province and commanding general of the military department of Mindanao and Sulu, which comprised the same territory.

During his earlier term of service, the fanatical Moros of Mohammedan faith who inhabit this section of the world had neither been subdued by force of arms nor pacified by fair and just treatment, and there was constant fighting in which many American and native soldiers lost their lives. The constabulary was for many years officered almost entirely by Americans.

General Wood, in his military capacity, conducted several important campaigns in various parts of Mindanao and Sulu, one of the most notable being the historical capture of Mont Bud-Dajo in 1909. He only resorted to force of arms after every effort to pacify the natives had failed and induced many of the recalcitrant Moro *datus* to lay down their arms without bloodshed.

Even after the Americans had demonstrated their military superiority some of the chieftans led their followers to the heavily wooded mountains and refused to submit to any form of government. Occasionally some proud *datu* who had become friendly to the government would, because of some real or fancied grievance, take to the hills with all of his subjects and either fight to a finish or remain in hiding, moving from place to place.

It was difficult to locate these hideouts in the enormous stretches of uninhabited, mountainous territory of the interior of Mindanao. The rebels were barefooted and traveled fast and far; needed no shelter except from rain; and could hide in the grass within a few yards of a passing column of troops without being detected.

When General Wood came to the Philippines on his last tour of duty as governor general, I was in business in Cotabato Province, having retired after many years service as governor of this province and as major in the constabulary. A Filipino, Captain Dionisio Guttierez, was at this time governor of the province.

Datu Santiago, who had known General Wood when he was governor of the Moro Province, sent word by runner that he would be willing to talk to any American about the possibility of surrendering, but would never talk to a Filipino. The majority of the Moros hated the Filipinos, mainly because they

had rarely come into contact with the better class of these people. Mindanao was used by the Spaniards as a place of banishment for criminals from the northern provinces, and the Moros naturally formed a bad opinion of the whole race, judging them, of course, by the relatively few outcasts exiled to their shores.

This information was relayed to the governor general at Manila, and he embarked on the government yacht *Apo* and sailed the six hundred miles south to Cotabato. Upon arrival he conferred with Colonel Waloe and Major Fletcher and expressed the wish that he had someone to volunteer to go and talk with Santiago and try and induce him to surrender, unconditionally.

Major Fletcher, who was one of the finest and bravest soldiers I have ever known, immediately volunteered for this perilous task, and his adjutant, Captain Roy Heard, insisted upon accompanying him.

Both of these officers were close personal friends of mine, and when I heard what they proposed to do I tried to dissuade them because of their slender chance of success. They were going to march blindly into the district where Santiago was rumored to be hiding; the outlaw scouts would see them without being seen themselves, and, not knowing their mission, might murder them. Should they be fortunate enough to contact Santiago, neither of them could talk the Moro dialect.

MY arguments ended in my deciding to go along with them. I read, write, and speak the Moro language. Besides, Datu Santiago had known me as governor of Cotabato Province and my presence might give him more confidence in the promise they were to convey from General Wood, which was that no troops would move from their camps for three days in order to give him ample time to come to the coast for a conference and return if he wished.

I called in a friendly Moro chieftan whose territory lay between Santiago's domain and the sea, and persuaded him to attempt to get a letter to the outlaw *datu*. In it I asked Santiago to meet us in a large clearing in the woods about four miles from the scout camp.

The friendly *datu* left with the letter at ten o'clock at night, and Major Fletcher, Captain Heard, and myself started shortly after daylight the following morning. We had not asked for a reply, since we were sure, as was the messenger, that the bearer would not be allowed to return until Santiago had either talked with us or decided to move further into the interior so there would be no possibility of his whereabouts being revealed by this man.

A firearm of any description is so highly valued by a Moro that we had discussed among ourselves the problem as to whether or not to wear our revolvers. They would be useless in case any treachery was planned, and we might be killed for their possession. We decided that a side arm was an Army officer's badge, and that it would be a sign of weakness not to go properly equipped, but that I as a civilian should not be armed.

For a little over a mile our trail was a footpath winding across a plateau covered with cogan grass waving gently in the morning breeze, with the heavy tropical dew glistening in the rising sun. The grass grew to a height of three to four feet, and the trail was only wide enough for one person. We were soon drenching wet.

From the plateau edge Mount Bugasan rose abruptly to some two thousand feet, and between them the Sugud River, with the force of a long mountain descent behind it, rushed over its rock-strewn bed with a mighty, continuous roar. During the rainy season this river would be extremely difficult to cross at this point, but we were now able to wade across with the water only up to our waists, using poles picked up on the bank to help keep our balance against the swift current.

Within a few yards of the river bank we entered a deep forest of *lauan,* (mahogany) trees. There are hundreds of immense forests like this in the interior of Mindanao, as yet untouched for commercial purposes because of lack of facilities to construct roads or railroads over swamps and mountains. The tropical sun had begun to show its strength and

it was a welcome relief to enter these woods, where the foliage was so thick that the light seemed like dusk.

Our trail soon led us up a steep incline and we had to pause frequently for rests. There was no dearth of jungle noises coming mysteriously from the underbrush, and occasionally we had glimpses of a wild deer or pig crossing the path and disappearing as if swallowed by the forest.

We reached the clearing which had been designated in the letter as the meeting place and after about an hour's wait saw Moros come to the edge at different points. They disappeared, and after a short time a Moro came directly to us and said, "You were kept waiting because Datu Santiago wished to be sure there were no soldiers following you. He will talk with you, but not here. You must go to the place where the constabulary burned his home a few days ago."

He explained that this place was "four cigarettes" distant—one of the Moro methods of computing time. I knew from long experience that this meant two hours more of weary climbing up the mountain side.

None of us relished the idea of meeting Santiago over the ashes of his former home, especially when we considered how it had been destroyed. However the Rubicon—or, in this case, the Sugud—had been crossed.

We followed the guide and eventually arrived at the ruins. Among the embers I could see the remains of an antiquated sewing machine and twisted, blackened pots, pans, and pieces of brass. Apparently the owners had not visited the place since its destruction—a fact that did not make me feel any easier, for the first view of the old home in ruins would naturally arouse sentimental feelings and bitterness.

After another wait, we saw a file of Moros march into the clearing. Each of them was dressed in tight fitting breeches, and was naked from the waist up and barefooted, and each carried, on his shoulder, a *kampilan* (a wicked looking cutting weapon with a blade three feet long. It is wielded with both hands and can sever a body in half.) I counted them as they approached, thirty-seven in number. When they reached the yard they separated into two lines and formed on two sides, within a few feet, of us, not a word being spoken. At the same time a number of men with rifles appeared around the edge of the clearing, staying close to the woods.

As soon as the formation was completed Datu Santiago came into the clearing, followed by his five wives. He was of slender build, about five feet seven inches in height, with a complexion lighter than that of the average Moro. His name, as well as his complexion, indicates that he had some trace of Spanish blood, which is rare among the Moros, although common among the Christian Filipinos.

He was barefooted and wore a tight fitting pair of black satin breeches reaching to his ankles. The top part of his body was partly covered by a tight fitting jacket, over bare skin, which did not reach to the waist by an inch and did not meet in front.

There were four gold buttons on each side and the sleeves reached to the wrists. As a head dress he wore the conventional Mohammedan *tubao,* a square cloth of purple silk artistically arranged on his head.

The women were dressed in white jackets reaching below their waists and buttoned up to the neck. These jackets were skin tight and showed every line of their bodies. They also were barefooted, and the lower part of their bodies were covered by heavy, varicolored, silk sarongs.

The sarong is used both as wearing apparel and as a sleeping garment. The Moro women weave the cloth on old fashioned hand looms, usually using silk threads of different colors. The woven cloth is about six feet square and two of the ends are sewn together to form the finished garment. It is worn in various manners, sometimes folded at one end and wrapped around the waist or under the arm-pits with one corner tucked in, and sometimes full length, draped over one shoulder. Their hair was combed back straight from the forehead and they wore no head dress except a tortoise shell comb. Every one of their fingers seemed to be covered with ornate rings.

AS Datu Santiago approached us it was plain that he was laboring under terrific excitement. His eyes were flashing, his face flushed, and he was trembling all over. His kris was half withdrawn from its sheath, and as he came near he shouted *"Babuyan su manga Filipino* (the Filipinos are pigs). See how flat my stomach is. I haven't eaten for three days waiting to get the body of a Filipino to satisfy my hunger!" He was speaking figuratively; there is no known case of cannibalism among the Moros.

At this point all five of the wives created an unwelcome diversion by running over to the ruins and beginning to poke about among the debris, wailing as they found the remains of some cherished article. A half starved cat ran drunkenly to the favorite wife. She picked it up and, moaning loudly, began berating the government soldiers.

Santiago drew his *kris* all the way from the scabbard and shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, looking around at his knife men and riflemen as if to see if everyone was in his proper position. I could see some *kampilan* bearers covetcously eyeing the .45 automatics of Fletcher and Heard, and their fingers taking a firmer grip on the handles of their knives, and knew that they were ready and anxious to get busy if their chief would only give the word.

We realized that the situation was desperate and that immediate action of some kind was necessary if a crisis was to be averted. I tried to say a few words to Santiago, but saw that his attention was mostly directed to what his women were saying. I asked him for permission to talk to his wives and he ordered three of the "guard of honor" to accompany me. I walked over to the ruins and began talking to the women who were making the most noise, telling them that the government would replace all of their burned possessions. This was no false promise, since I felt sure that such an expenditure would be approved.

With the exception of the favorite, their grief was gradually appeased and they went back to their husband's side. The number one girl continued to weep softly and stroke her pathetic looking cat, so I concentrated all my powers of persuasion on her, picturing how nice a brand new home would be and telling her about a newer model sewing machine that could be worked by foot instead of hand.

All of this seemed to make no impression whatsoever, and the cat appeared to be her only interest in life, so I started talking about cats I had known. I knew little about the subject and had to draw considerably on my imagination, but, at least, she became interested and was listening to what I was saying. Her cat had one green and one pink eye and I explained that while there were so many finer and more beautiful cats, I had never seen one like this and would like to have it for that reason, and would see that she got a pedigreed cat in return. I also promised to take good care of her pet.

She finally smiled and turned the darn cat over to me, which considerably hampered my oratory from then on, as I was unable to make the proper gestures to illustrate my remarks and, at the same time, hold the animal.

However, I was amply repaid for all my trouble when she helped calm her husband so that we could discuss matters rationally. Even then, he would start on another tirade every few minutes and it required great patience to get him to a near normal state of mind.

General Wood had told us that the *Apo* would be anchored in Sugud Bay by 3:00 P.M. this day. Santiago asked over and over again if we were sure that the "big chief" would be there with the big boat, and finally said that he would take my word because I had always been fair and just to his people when I was governor.

It was just as well that I did not know then that we were going to be in much graver danger within a short time.

We were most careful not to make any promises except that there would be no military operations for three days, and that this period would be extended if the governor general saw fit. He was advised to surrender, and to go down prepared to do so by taking along the guns he had captured at Bugasan and the men who had participated in that affair. On the other hand we weren't painting him any pictures of the long term imprison-

ment which we knew he deserved and would undoubtedly get.

The *kampilan* men were ordered off and left reluctantly with many a scowling look, and Datu Santiago called his riflemen, fourteen in number, and told them they were going with him to Sugud Bay, probably to surrender. No explanation, just a kingly edict, and they had heard none of the preliminary discussion. The extra guns had been acquired by purchase, but they had to go too, since the possession of any firearm, without a license, was illegal.

IT was now about 3:00 P.M. and the Datu suggested that we spend the night with him and go down early the next morning. This brought up another delicate situation, but Captain Heard, who is a born diplomat, got around it by saying that the governor general was expecting him and had probably prepared a big feast on the ship and it might make him mad if the guest of honor didnt' show up.

I honestly believe that if Santiago had not agreed to go at once and we had been forced to spend the night among these Moros, who were half crazed from what they had done and what they feared in the way of retribution, all three of us would have been stark mad before morning. The possibilities of Santiago changing his mind were too great. Our nerves were like high tension wires by this time.

When Datu Santiago decided to go there was no waiting for his wives nor anyone else to get prepared; they went as they were.

We started down the mountain, single file, by a different trail than the one we had come up over. One of the Moros took the lead as a guide, followed by Major Fletcher, then Santiago, and myself, Captain Heard, a number of Moros carrying guns, the five wives, more men with guns, and a number of men armed with *krises* bringing up the rear.

The entire way was downhill until we reached the ocean, and we traveled fast. A few stops were made for a rest and a smoke, and on these occasions we talked to Santiago continuously to prevent him from getting excited again.

A short distance from Santiago's former home the trail ended in a winding mountain stream and followed its bed for more than a mile. This river was about a foot and a half deep and slippery rocks made the going somewhat difficult for men wearing shoes. All three of us experienced several tumbles into the water.

When we emerged from the stream the trail again wound through the dense woods until the lowland was reached, where there was an uncomfortable march through thick reed grass, higher than our heads.

We forded a wide river, the name of which I have forgotten, and were on the beach of Sugud Bay shortly before sundown.

To our consternation, the *Apo* was not in sight. Some three miles distant we discerned a small ship's launch near a point of land running close to shore, and knew that someone from the *Apo* was trolling for fish, and that the *Apo* was probably anchored around this point, out of our sight. We learned later that this was exactly what had happened, and that General Wood himself was fishing from the launch. He had waited until 4:30 P.M., and decided that we could we could not possibly be back that afternoon and moved the ship nearer to a good fishing ground and a better anchorage.

A military launch, used by the Philippine Scout detachment to bring supplies, was anchored in the bay near the beach but some distance from where we were. Without thinking of the effect on the Moros, Major Fletcher ran down the beach toward the launch with the intention of boarding it and going for the *Apo*.

When Fletcher started to run down the beach, the Moros were too surprised at first to make any attempt to stop him or do anything but stare after him. After a few seconds they surrounded Captain Heard and me and it seemed that all of them were talking excitedly at the same time. The fact that they entirely misinterpreted his action by thinking he was running away from them did not alter the fact that we were left in a very dangerous situation. I tried to explain that he was going to bring the general and his big boat from around the point, but their primitive minds

could not understand why he had started on the run without saying a word.

Right in our presence, Santiago began to discuss with one of his lieutenants whether or not they should kill us then and there. Fletcher had already embarked on the launch and was on his way.

ASIDE from the fact that Fletcher's impulsive act had aroused their suspicion, these Moros knew that there was a large force of soldiers camped within a mile of this beach.

They were between two wide river mouths and the tide was coming in so that they would shortly be unfordable and their only way of escape cut off; and it would soon be dark, since there is little or no twilight in the tropics. He had been assured that the big boat would be in the bay when he arrived, and with all this it is small wonder that they suspected treachery.

Up to this time I had thought I was fairly good at speaking the Moro dialect, but I now became actually fluent. I was not only talking to persuade them to wait for the governor general, but to save our lives.

Captain Heard and I were both perspiring, and I told him, "For God's sake, don't reach for your handkerchief or get your hand near your pistol, as the slightest move in that direction might be misinterpreted."

To add to the mental torture, I kept thinking that if an accidental shot should be fired in the military camp by some recruit, or if a deer or pig should appear in the edge of the woods around the camp and be shot at by several soldiers, our finish would be certain.

In the middle of one of my eloquent explanations and appeals, Santiago took a step nearer, looked me squarely in the eye for a few seconds, then turned. As one person, his entire outfit started on a trot back along the trail for somewhere, crossed the river which was now up to their shoulders or necks, and disappeared into the tall grass.

It took several minutes for me to realize that we were alone and unharmed, and the reaction after the combined events of the day was terrific. Words are inadequate to describe my mixed emotions at that time, including the feeling of depression because the mission had, after all, failed with success just around a point of land in the sea.

The only theory that I can advance as to why we were not slain on the beach, in the face of these Moro's belief that they were being trapped, is that Datu Santiago really believed that the circumstances which caused him to murder Governor Bayot and his companions were extenuating, if not justifiable, and that up to then he had committed no unpardonable crime.

But should he kill two Americans in addition to his other offense, there would be no possibility of his ever being allowed to surrender.

At no time did we feel any resentment toward General Wood for the failure of the *Apo* to be in Sugud Bay we arrived.

He had every reason to believe that we could not contact Santiago and return with him in one day.

However, he expressed his sincere regret at having subjected all three of us to the terrible ordeal on the beach.

General Wood spent three days, with the *Apo* anchored in Sugud Bay, trying to get another contact with Santiago. At first the ship's whistle was blown at intervals and the sound could be heard reverberating through the mountains. This was to let Santiago know that the big boat was there.

The general's military aides, Colonels G. T. Langhorne and Gordon Johnson, went ashore with interpreters and marched several miles into the interior to friendly Moro settlements, where they despatched letters, but none of the messengers ever reached Santiago. It was later learned that he had moved, with all of his followers, to the adjoining province of Lanao and fortified an almost inaccessible mountain top.

Datu Santiago and his band were finally wiped out in a series of engagements with government troops over a period of more than a year.

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

WELCOME to our Writers' Brigade is Major Calvin Brooks Carter, who writes of a peril-filled personal experience in the Philippines—the fact story "Close to Death." He gives us these notes on himself:

Born in Texas, graduate of Southwestern University.

Enlisted in U. S. Army in 1906. Served seven months and eleven days and discharged to accept commission in Philippine Constabulary. Served twelve years in Constabulary, retiring as Major. Was Provincial Governor, Cotabato Province, P. I. Held commission as Major, Officers Reserve Corps, U. S. Army 1917 to 1922. Employed by the Nicaraguan Government, upon recommendation of the U. S. State and War Departments, to organize and train the Nicaraguan National Guard, and was Chief of the organization from 1925 to 1927 when the U. S. Marines took over on account of revolution. Also held an honorary commission as Colonel of the Nicaraguan Regular Army.

The following letter might be pertinent in connection with this story:

Office of the Governor General of the Philippine Islands. "Mr. C. B. Carter was formerly Governor of Cotabato and an officer in the Constabulary (Major). He has been engaged in various business enterprises in Cotabato since leaving the government service, running a rice mill, ice and electric plant. During the recent Moro troubles under Datu Santiago he rendered valuable assistance to the government." (Sgd.) "Leonard Wood, Governor General."

AT THE August Camp-Fire we mentioned the incident, from a recent history of the Lost Battalion, of a doughboy pulling a copy of *Adventure* from a signal panel roll and reading a story during a lull in the heavy fighting in the Vinarville ravine. The doughboy's name was Larney, and now we hear from him—J. F. Larney, of Watertown, N. Y.

I was interested to note that someone had called your attention to the fact that I carried an *Adventure* magazine into the incident commonly called "The Lost Battalion." I have been a constant reader of *Adventure* since long before the Great War.

On Sept. 26, 1918, when the Meuse-Argonne drive started, I went over with then Major Charles M. Whittlesey, as aeroplane signaller, or "panel-man" for the 1st Bn. 308th Inf. 77th Division. I was under orders to stay at his elbow with my panels. He was my company commander (Hq. Co., Signal Platoon, 308th Inf.) from Camp Upton. We wore combat packs (no raincoat or blanket), and besides rifle and bayonet I had the magazine, my diary, iron rations, a couple of fountain pens, ink, two cartons of cigarettes, mess kit and toilet articles (soap, toothbrush, shaving brush and razor) and the roll of panel cloths, about the size of a small loaf of bread. This list is far more compact than it sounds. The Lost Battalion incident occurred between the dates Oct. 2-Oct. 8, 1918, and my diary, kept during those days, covers the entire period and my 15 months in the army.

I have always had the desire to "come to the Camp-Fire" of your publication, through these many years, but never have felt qualified to do else but listen in the outer circle. Now that my name has been mentioned at the fire, I have felt the urge to develop the reference a bit. Many hours, of the several days we were behind the German lines on that hillside, were spent merely crouched down for protection against snipers, hand

grenades and trench mortars, so a fellow not actually on a post with a machine gun or automatic rifle had time to transport himself for a brief moment occasionally, in the daytime, to New Guinea or elsewhere, through the medium of the magazine. Perhaps I was the only one who had reading material in there. After receiving machine-gun leg wound and a piece of H. E. in the elbow on Oct. 4 I was less mobile until Oct. 8 when we went out. Perhaps that was when I read about New Guinea.

I would be glad to hear from any of the survivors or others interested.

WE on the staff were particularly interested to hear from Theodore S. Solomons, *Ask Adventure* expert, in the recent discussion of Peary vs. Cook. We had heard from Victor Shaw, who had lived with Cook and had been on a Peary relief expedition—he inclined to believe both men told the truth. Mr. Solomons lived for ten years in Eskimo country, and is well known as a student of polar travel as well as of mountaineering. He writes:

I think this Cook-Peary North Pole controversy should be tossed back and forth across the Camp-Fire until competent authority can be got to go into it fully and finally as a research problem of geographical history and geophysical science.

I never knew Cook. I had one talk with Peary. Aside from having read practically everything published on the subject I can claim no special acumen in the dispute except what might be developed by a ten years' intimacy with the Arctic during which I traveled over the northern ice probably less than Peary, possibly more than Cook.

I think it unlikely either man reached the Pole. But were it not for the bad flavor of his McKinley expedition I should have much more confidence in Cook's close approach to it than in Peary's. In this, as I shall try to explain, I am influenced less by the immediate facts than by the background and the characters of the two men. For the issue is one of veracity: Did both men speak the truth? Or did one or both lie? Hence their diaries, their astronomical observations are as useless as any "self-serving" document in a court of justice. The only other human witnesses are the two Eskimos with Cook and the one Negro and Eskimos with Peary. The usefulness of their testimony is seriously impaired by their incapacity to judge and by a strong probability of bias or "influence"; though if they had been promptly questioned by disinterested and skillful examiners they would probably have thrown a determining light upon the issues. Questioned by any other kind, the effort was foredoomed to failure — as was implied in Harry Payne Whitney's statement that Cook's natives asked him later what it was that "Peary's men wanted them to say?"

I know Eskimos as perhaps few white men do, for I not only lived in close intimacy with them for about ten years, but made a detailed study of them and their psychology. In the Nome country a young native whom I personally knew to be honest and truthful, as nearly all Eskimos are, was called to the witness stand to testify concerning the staking of a claim which was valuable enough to engender some rather fancy flights of perjury. The young Eskimo had not been bribed. That was unnecessary. He was a friend of one of the litigants. But under cross-examination he contradicted himself rather frankly; and when asked why he had made the original statements he shrugged and said, "Oh, me damn liar, that's all!"

Probably E-took-i-shook and Ah-we-lak, when catechized by Peary's men, had aimed to please!

Probably the most fortunate circumstance in Cook's life was that Roald Amundsen was his shipmate, companion and fellow worker —demon worker—in that terrible winter. For Amundsen was a man singularly esteemed for the flawless integrity of his character; and if anyone knew the difference between men and mice in the gruelling tests of Arctic exploration it was Amundsen. Before he himself became a martyr to his own heroism in the saving of life in the Arctic, Roald Amundsen could scarcely find words to express his admiration, his trust and his confidence in the ability and in the *character* of Frederick Cook! Upon that expedition, in its darkest peril, the man now growing old under the world's reprobation, was a hero, not of the rocket variety, soaring for a moment or an hour under the stimulus of an emotional flare-up, but a day by day, week in, week out, hero.

It has never been disputed, and certainly not by the two splendid Eskimos with whom Cook starved yet struggled on, that after his return to the Arctic Archipelago from the trek over the sea ice toward the Pole, for a solid year he worked his way eastward toward the settlements of upper Baffin Bay with almost literally *no outfit or equipment.* There are few on this planet who could have done it. More, there are few who *would* have done it, even though the stake were life itself. Cook may have been a liar about the Pole and about McKinley. He may have sent "come on" letters through Uncle Sam's mail

to oil-lease prospects. To be a liar and a none-too-scrupulous salesman is rather easy. But my hat is off to the man with enough of the lesser gods in him to do what Cook *must have done* in 1908 and 1909.

As a rule such men do not lie. They are too simple souled. But he could have lied, and it may be that he did. When men set themselves to such a task as did Cook and Peary there is usually an inner urge, a veritable compulsion, that gnaws at them and will not be refused. Then, if Fate downs them, they often lie to satisfy the passion that masters them. In a sense it is the passion itself that lies!

Along about the time Cook was accomplishing the Herculean task of liberating his comrades by sawing out a ship into open Antarctic water, Peary was trying to cross north Greenland and faking details of an "Independence Sound" on the Atlantic side. A few years later a truly heroic explorer—Mylius Ericsen, I believe it was—perished on that North Atlantic Coast of Greenland partly, it is but fair to say, through delays caused by believing Peary's mythical topography.

Probably it was a case of actual incapacity to stomach defeat, this compulsion to make of a wish fulfillment an actual one. And it may have been the same thing precisely which caused him, if he did not really make the Pole, to fake his tremendous daily mileages on the return trip.

The men were necessarily tired, to put it mildly. And in that condition to do, day after day, what few, if any, men are recorded ever to have done—drive about twice as far as the average hard day's drive over the kind of ice which scores of us now living, and many score now dead, know to be the sort of ice that Peary and Henson *had* to traverse at that time of year in their southward drive—well, Henson might, conceivably, have done it. But Peary, several years over fifty, never an unusually strong or sturdy ice traveler—it is asking too much of human credence!

One questions, "Why didn't he, then, if his story is faked, have used in his diary more believable mileages?" The answer is simply that there were so many miles that had to be accounted for, and only so many days to account for them between the time the last supporting party left him and the known date of his return. He *had* to use a high average—and make himself a superman!

It is irrelevant, perhaps, but Peary in personality was not convincing nor confidence inspiring. He was not very clever, and I think his main handicap was a kind of obstinacy, or worse. I was amazed at his dog-team equipment when, at the request of *The New York Times*, with which Peary was under contract in his last expedition, I visited him at the ship to make any suggestions that might be useful to him. I was briefly in New York from Arctic Alaska.

I found that Peary was using Eskimo gear with very little modification, though his sleds were fair. Only fair.

It was at a time when the Far North had become *miner-ized*, so to speak. All over Northern Alaska and North Arctic Canada tough, canny white men had been pitting their strength and skill against the endless drag of the "nigger-heads" and the interminable pressure ridges and windrows of fresh and salt ice. In order to live and work on sea and land in Arctic regions the mechanical genius of our race had employed itself in slowly perfecting a technique in the art of sled transport. We were able to beat the natives from one hundred to two hundred percent in pounds safely carried per man-dog unit. Peary's problem, like ours, was a purely mechanical one. I knew when I saw his outfit that he could immeasurably improve his chance of reaching the Pole if he were to substitute our collars and harness, single-trees and drag lines, even our sleds, for his merely improved Eskimo contraptions. He was staking his reputation, his life's fulfillment, his life itself.

Mr. Peary was coldly polite. He "really wasn't interested"! Incredible? But true.

I think Peary made his greatest mistake when he sent that message denouncing Cook. He had just gotten into touch with things at the Greenland outposts on his return from the Pole. He learned that Dr. Cook had preceded him, and that Cook had claimed the conquest of the Pole after a two years' struggle. He knew no details, had nothing that could be considered adequate evidence of fraud. Yet he denounced him in unmeasured terms. It was a diplomatic blunder. What if Cook should thereupon have proved his discovery genuine? But also it was intensely unsportsmanlike.

With the evidence of Peary's north Greenland fakery as a counterpoise for Cook's reputed McKinley fakery, the two men went into the North Pole adventure not unequally matched in the matter of closeted skeletons which were later to be revealed as such to the world; and, superficially at least, it would seem to have been a case of the pot calling the kettle black when Peary denounced his rival. The truth is mighty. Mighty scarce, and mighty hard to come by in matters of human history. But I think this subject is well worth the time and cost of a thorough probing both for the sake of the permanent record and for the benefit of the men themselves in order that their repute may be settled upon as high a level as ascertainable truth will permit.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

A CONTEST of shooting irons.

Request:—To help keep and promote the peace in our revolver club will you please advise me on the following?

If the same ammunition is fired from a revolver and an automatic pistol, .38 or .45 calibre for instance, which has the greater foot per second velocity and hitting power, the automatic or the revolver? The barrel lengths being the same, of course.

—H. L. Blood, Greenfield, Mass.

Reply by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—The findings of the Ordnance Board seem to indicate that cartridge for cartridge, and barrel lengths of near the same, the automatic pistol gives just a shade more velocity than does the revolver.

The evidence I go by on this is the difference in velocity between .45 Colt automatic pistol, Government pistol, and the Model 1917 revolver, using the .45 automatic cartridge. The pistol gives sixteen feet seconds more velocity than does the revolver, both using the same load. So you see, in the heavy caliber the difference is so slight it does not matter.

I know of no .38 revolver and automatic firing the same ammunition, so can say nothing as to the matter there. I do know, however, that the .357 Magnum gives about 50 feet seconds more velocity in my 5½" barrel revolver, than does the Super .38 in the Colt automatic. And with its flat point lead bullet, the revolver will be a better killer than the full metal case bullet of the automatic pistol.

Just last week I tested, in the same block of fir and with the cartridges from the same box, my .22 Colt automatic pistol, and my .22 H & R Sportsman revolver, and the .22-32 and K.22 Smith & Wesson revolvers. The .22 automatic Colt pistol shot about ¾" deeper into the block than did the S & W revolvers, and ⅜" more than the H & R. So you see it's a very small matter, and I place more faith in the sure functioning of the revolvers than in the automatics.

THE original "queer bird."

Request:—Will you be so good as to give me some information regarding the "Kiwi"? I believe it is an Australian bird and I wish to know about its size, weight, its habits, uses, and any further data you can give me.

—S. Francis Jacobs, Hollywood, Calif.

Reply by Mr. Davis Quinn:—As might be expected from its range (New Zealand), the kiwi is an ancient bird, a curious survival of early avifaunal evolution. Strangely plumaged, it is about the size of a large domestic fowl and weighs similarly. Its practically vestigial wings are flightless, but the bird is fleet of foot, and also uses the foot in self defense. Kiwis are nocturnal, and by day sleep or hide in burrows or under rocks or tree roots. The food consists chiefly of earthworms. The nest is constructed in an enlarged cavity at the end of a tunnel in the ground, said to be made by the female alone, with the opening under a tree root, stone, tussock of grass, etc. Generally one egg or two, smooth and pure white or slightly greenhued, are laid; these eggs are enormous for the size of the bird, being in weight equal to a quarter the weight of an adult kiwi.

There are several species of the bird in New Zealand, one being confined to South Island, one to North Island, one to both Islands; these species are essentially similar in common characteristics. The bird is not found outside of New Zealand, where it

ranges the wooded country and hills, to the snow line.

The Maoris have hunted the kiwi for its flesh, and for its plumage for ornamental use.

THE camera can't replace the color palette—yet.

Request:—Is there a process for printing a one-film all-color transparent? That is, not the three individual color plates, but, the film used in colored projections.

If there isn't, could the film gelatine be used on printing paper?

—René Varlet, New York, N. Y.

Reply by Mr. Paul L. Anderson:—Your question is not quite clear, but I gather that what you want to do is to take a Kodachrome or Dufaycolor film and make a print from this on paper, in one printing. If this is the idea, there is no way in which it can be done. To get a color print on paper from such a transparency, it is necessary to make a set of three-color separation negatives, make a print from each in the color complementary to the taking color, and superpose these three prints on one paper, the prints being made either by the Wash-Off Relief process, by the Chromatone process, or in carbon or carbro.

It is possible, however, to get your set of three-color separation negatives with one exposure in an ordinary camera. For information about this, as well as about Chromatone, write to the Defender Photo Supply Company, Rochester, New York, and ask for information about their Tripac and Chromatone processes.

There is no way that I know of whereby the film of a Kodachrome can be transferred to paper, and even if there were, the results could hardly be satisfactory, since these films are designed to be shown by transmitted light and would be far too dense for reflected light.

AN umpire calls out—for advice.

Request:—I'd appreciate it if you would answer the following baseball question:

One man out, man on first, two strikes on batter. Batter attempts to bunt on third strike, but ball pops into air about ten feet and is caught by the catcher on foul territory. Following catch, catcher whips ball to first baseman who steps on bag and umpire calls runner out, contending that it is a double play.

One contention of the play is that the runner could not be put out as when the batter bunted the ball foul, he was automatically out, hence no play was possible as the ball was dead, whether or not it was caught by the catcher.

Another contention is that the first baseman must touch the runner coming back to first base on the play.

Nevertheless there is considerable discussion down here about it and we hope to settle it one way or the other.

So if you let me know whether or not there can be a continuous play on a foul third strike, bunted and caught by the catcher and thrown to first for a double play, we will straighten out the matter.

—John F. Parker, Taunton, Mass.

Reply by Mr. Frederick Lieb:—The question you submit is a stickler. My thought in the matter is that the batsman is automatically out as soon as the batsman bunts the ball foul. In that case, no play could be made on the runner at first base. However, were a play permissible, there would be no need to touch the runner. Tagging the bag before runner returned would be sufficient.

I should like you to submit this play to a higher authority than myself. Write to Ernest Quigley, National Baseball League, R. C. A. Building, Rockefeller Center, New York City. Use my name if you care to. Mr. Quigley was the National League umpire, and is now engaged in promotional work. His opinion should settle the matter.

CROOKED coinage.

Request:—I have a silver dollar of 1804 in very good condition. Can you give me some idea of its market value?

—Mrs. J. G. Krul, Louisville, Ky.

Reply by Mr. William L. Clark:—The 1804 Dollar of the United States is a very notorious coin. There is no proof that any silver dollars were struck at the Mint in that year. However, it has been established that a number of "1804" dollars were struck about 1838 for collectors only, and of these, there are seventeen specimens, all of which are in known collections. These coins are all struck from a die which shows finer workmanship than the coins of 1801, 1802 and 1803. Nearly every 1804 dollar which turns up, other than those fine specimens of the 1838 period, is one of the 1801, 2 or 3 dollars with an altered date. If your coin shows signs of having been in circulation, that is, in use and showing wear, it is undoubtedly one of this class of altered dates.

I would suggest that you write to John Zug, Bowie, Maryland. He is a dealer and might be interested. He would have to see the coin before he could make an offer. If your coin is of the altered date class, it is

worth about two dollars. If the date is genuine, it is worth considerably more.

REDSKIN versus Paleface—battles without glory.

Request:—When and what was the Garces Massacre? The only details of this which I possess are that it took place in Arizona, at some time after 1776, and a Spanish priest called Father Garces was connected with it.

In a book called "Haydn's Dictionary of Dates," which gave the history of the various countries in the form of chronological lists of dates, in the section dealing with the American Indian were listed the three following statements, which I quote verbatim:

July 12th, 1891. Revolt of the Chippewas.
July 12th, 1891. Rising in Arizona. Defensive measures ordered by Government.
April 30th, 1893. Navajo rising near South Colorado.

These bald assertions are not much to go upon, I know, but do you happen to have discovered any references to them?

Am I correct in thinking that the Rogue River War took place in 1854 and that a chief called Captain Jim was leader of the Indians? Also what tribes were engaged?

—Ronald Lundie, Hounslow, Eng.

Reply by Mr. H. F. Robinson:—Regarding the "Padre Garces Massacre." Father Garces, a Franciscan, had made a trip into what is now Arizona, visiting the Hopi tribe and going on south to the delta of the Colorado River. On his return he told the powers that be that on the lower Colorado was a magnificent place to make a permanent settlement. Finally he was given permission, and a little "army" of twelve privates and a sergeant accompanied several priests. They made friends with the Yuma Indians and settled there. Later, after Garces had sent back glowing reports, another party of twenty-one soldiers, twelve laborers and twenty colonists arrived, the colonists bringing wives and children.

To quote from "The Story of Arizona," written by my brother, Will. H. Robinson:

"To make their welcome at the hands of the expectant savages doubly sure, these new colonists calmly took possession of what Indian fields they wanted, and asked the natives the old question, 'What are you going to do about it?' For the time being it seemed nothing was done about it, and a pueblo was established on the west side of the river at the mouth of the Gila, which was called Concepcion, and a second village was laid out three leagues further south and christened the unassuming name of San Pedro y San Pablo de Bicuner.

"For nearly two years the colonies maintained a precarious existence. The Yumas, next to the Apaches, were considered the most dangerous Indians of the Southwest; add to that fact that the soldiers were brutal and licentious and we find a condition that made disaster a little less than inevitable.

"The padres, who realized fully the harvest that all this was leading to, did all they could to restrain their countrymen and placate the Indians, but the trouble was past mending."

Another influx of soldiers and others followed and they pastured their stock, nearly a thousand head, upon the mesquite beans on which the Yumas depended for food.

"On Tuesday, June 17, 1781, the lightning struck. At Concepcion, while in the very act of celebrating mass, Father Garces was clubbed to death by the natives for whom he had labored so earnestly. The commandante of the village who was also in the church at the time was killed in trying to reach his command, as was the corporal who followed him. It is recorded that the heroic Garces gave the dying soldier absolution even though he was at the point of death himself.

"The Indians attacked Bicuner and killed two padres and destroyed the church, then attacked the soldier forces who were on the east side of the river, and after desperate fighting, killed them to the last man."

A year or more later a body of troops were sent against the Indians and 110 of them killed.

I can find no statement regarding a "Revolt of the Chippewas" in 1891. They are a large tribe being both in the United States and in Canada, ranging over a territory more than one thousand miles east and west. It may be that some small band had trouble, but I have not been able to locate it.

You quote "July 12, 1891, Rising in Arizona." This was a tempest in a teapot. One village of the Hopi Indians refused to send their children to school, and refused to recognize the authority of the Indian agent. A troop of cavalry from a nearby military post went to the scene, the leader was arrested and the children put in school.

Again you quote, "April 30, 1893 Navajo rising near South Colorado." About this time an effort was being made to stamp out polygamy among the Navajos, and men with plural wives ordered to give up all but one and make proper provision for the discards. Quite a number refused to do this. Several were arrested and taken to the Indian Agency at Shiprock and placed in the jail. A successful jail delivery followed and these men with a comparatively few followers took refuge in Beautiful Mountain, and defied the government to regulate their married life. A few

troops were held in readiness in case the malcontents should raid and burn the agency as they threatened. General Hugh Scott came in to try and settle the trouble, and alone with an interpreter went into the Beautiful Mountain stronghold and finally convinced the revolters that it was best to give up any idea of an armed resistance, and the matter soon blew over.

I cannot place the Rogue River War, nor any "Captain Jim." Possibly you are thinking of the Modoc trouble led by "Captain Jack" in about 1873.

This was about the time that the Government began setting aside "reservations" for the Indians. The Modocs, who numbered only a few hundreds, were living among the fine hunting lands of south Oregon, when they were removed to a section where the soil was so barren that they would not stay. They hastened back to Oregon, and in their anger defied the U. S. Government to remove them. They retreated to the lava beds just over the line into California. Much sympathy was generally felt for them because of their treatment. Finally communication was opened with them and under a flag of truce a Peace Commission of six met with the Indians to discuss matters. Suddenly the Indians attacked the white men, killing General Canby and Dr. Thomas and badly wounding General Meachem. This outrage led to a vigorous prosecution of the war against them and they were finally captured, and Captain Jack and two of his brother chiefs, the leaders, were hanged.

CARNIVAL cut-ups — the "Snake Show" rattlers.

Request:—I was with a carnival for a couple of months last year, and saw the "Snake Show" men handling, and actually being bitten by, live rattlers. Would these have had their poison fangs or sacs removed? Patterson Brothers Rattlesnake Ranch at Abilene, Texas, claim that it is dangerous to try and render a rattler harmless by extracting fangs, as they will grow back two or three times, and a remaining stub of fang will transmit the venom. This rattler at the carnival bit the man hard enough to draw blood.

—E. R. Sprague, Romeo, Mich.

Reply by Mr. Clifford H. Pope:—A person can develop a degree of immunity to snake venom but I do not believe that anyone can develop enough to be able to let a large rattler bite him repeatedly and not get sick. The man that you saw probably worked a little sleight-of-hand. One famous snake man that puts up a similar exhibition removes the fang from one side but leaves the opposite one in place. When he presses the snake's mouth down on the arm the fang that actually enters (on the side toward his audience of course) is a secondary one. The good fang (which has been shown) is on the opposite side and is cleverly made to miss his arm. Even this method probably gets some venom in him but the callous condition of his arm together with what acquired immunity he has seems to take care of that. What Patterson Brothers told you about renewal of the fangs is right.

LEARNING to talk turkey.

Request:—The other day, in the woods near here, a local hunter demonstrated a turkey call, and he was good. At least I would judge so by the way the turkeys acted—came running like ma had just rung the dinner bell. The "call" was made from the wing bone of a turkey, but just how it works I don't know.

Can those things be bought or is it necessary to make them? How do they work?

—S. H. Evans, So. Boston, Va.

Reply by Mr. Paul M. Fink:—The turkey wing bonecall is made by cutting off both ends of the bone, punching out the marrow and letting it dry thoroughly. In use one end is in the mouth, and the hands cupped around the other, and the caller sucks with a sort of a chirping sound through the bone, varying the sound by opening and closing his hands. It's almost impossible to tell just how to do it, just as it would be to tell you on paper how to sing, but a little experimenting will let you get the idea. The main requirement is a keen sense of animal mimicry, so that the note is an exact reproduction of the real call of the turkey.

While the wing bone is frequently used, and some callers say it is the only thing that will bring results, still I have heard it done with a pipe stem so realistically that my ears couldn't tell the difference.

Until some years after the Civil War, my grandfather lived in the adjoining county to you—Charlotte—and was considered a fine turkey caller. The wing bone was the instrument he used.

The best instructions I can give are to get a bone, try it out a while, and then, listening to a wild or barnyard fowl, strive to reproduce its talk.

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Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure.*

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Boxing—CAPT. JEAN V. GROMBACH, 113 W. 57th St., N. Y. C.

Canoeing: *paddling, sailing, cruising, regattas*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 30A W. Cook Av., Libertyville, Ill.

Coins: *and Medals*—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., N. Y. C.

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Fishing: *salt water, bottom fishing, surf casting, trolling; equipment and locations.* C. BLACKBURN MILLER, care of *Adventure.*

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Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motor Camping and Trailer Camping—MAJOR CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M.D., 152 W. 65th St., N. Y. C.

Motorcycling—*regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, 161 Ferguson Av., Burlington, Vt.

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 1632 So. Hayworth Av., Los Angeles, Calif.

Old-Time Sailoring—CHAS. H. HALL, 446 Ocean Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. No 3, Box 69, Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns:*foreign and American makes; wing shooting*—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care of *Adventure.*

★**Skiing and Snowshoeing**—W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Small Boating: *skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Stamps—DR. H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Av., Denver, Colo.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y. C.

Swords: *spears, pole arms and armor*—CAPT. R. E. GARDNER, 980 Northwest Blvd., Columbus, Ohio.

Tournament Fly and Bait Casting—CHIEF STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—CHARLES B. CRANFORD, County Office Bldg., Recreation Comm., White Plains, N. Y.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Pl., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American; north of the Panama Canal; customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Automobiles and Aircraft Engines: *design, operation and maintenance*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care of *Adventure.*

Aviation: *airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachutes, gliders*—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

Big Game Hunting: *guides and equipment*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Entomology: *insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Pa.

Forestry: *in the United States; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry: *tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, Chapel Hill, N. C.

Herpetology: *reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H POPE, care of *Adventure*

Marine Architecture: *ship modeling*—CHAS. H. HALL, 446 Ocean Av., Brooklyn, N. Y.

The Merchant Marine. GORDON MACALLISTER, care of *Adventure.*

Motor Vehicles: *operation, legislative restrictions and traffic*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care of *Adventure*

Ornithology: *birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 3508 Kings College Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *outfitting, work in out-of-the-way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J

Precious and semi-precious stones: *cutting and polishing of gem materials; technical information*—F. J. ESTERLIN, 901-902 Shreve Bldg., 210 Post Road, San Francisco, Calif.

Radio: *telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Railroads: *in the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*.

Taxidermy—SETH BULLOCK, care of *Adventure*.

Wildcrafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE SUBJECTS

Army Matters: *United States and Foreign*—MAJOR GLEN R. TOWNSEND, 708 Angenette Ave., Kirkwood, Missouri.

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, 251 Third St., Fair Haven, N. J.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, 251 Third St., Fair Haven, N. J.

U. S. Marine Corps—MAJOR F. W. HOPKINS, care of *Adventure*.

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Quartermaster, Ariz., care Conner Field.

★New Guinea—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure*.

★New Zealand: Cook Island, Samoa—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania—ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandridge St., Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Yatina," 3 Lucknow St., Willoughby, N. S. W.

Hawaii—JOHN SNELL, Hawaii Equal Rights Comm., Honolulu, Hawaii.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon.*—V. B. WINDLE, care of *Adventure*. **2** *French Indo-China, Hong Kong, Macao, Tibet, Southern, Eastern and Central China.*—SEWARD S. CRAMER, care of *Adventure*. **3** *Northern China and Mongolia.*—PAUL H. FRANSON, Bldg. No. 3 Veterans Administration Facility, Minneapolis, Minn. **4** *Persia, Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure*. **5** ★*Palestine.*—CAPTAIN H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya.*—GORDON MAC CREAGH, 3482-16th Av., So., St. Petersburg, Florida. **3** *Tripoli Sahara caravans.*—CAPT. BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure*. **4** *Morocco.*—GEORGE E. HOLT, care of *Adventure*. **5** *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Nigeria.*—N. E. NELSON, 1641 Greenlawn Ave., Akron, Ohio. **6** *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, and Rhodesia.*—CAPT. F. J. FRANKLIN, Adventure Camp, Simi, Calif. **7** ★*Portuguese East.*—R. G. WARING, Corunna, Ont., Canada. **8** ★*Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa.*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure*.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, care of *Adventure*.

Europe, Part 1 *Denmark, Germany.*—G. I. COLBURN, care of *Adventure*.

★Central America—ROBERT S. BENJAMIN, care of *Adventure*.

South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile*—EDGAR YOUNG, care of *Adventure*. **2** *Venezuela, The Guianas, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, and Brasil.*—DR. PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, care of *Adventure*.

★West Indies—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1338, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

Mexico, Part 1 *Northern Border States.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. **2** *Quintana Roo, Yucatan, Campeche.*—W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Poplar Ave., Takoma Prk., Md.

Iceland—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure*.

Canada, Part 1 ★*Southeastern Quebec.*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 24 Plessis St., Quebec, Canada. **2** ★*Height of Land Region, Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec, Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin.*—S. E. SANGSTER, care *Adventure*. **3** ★*Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, *The Courier Advocate*, Trenton, Ont., Canada. **4** ★*Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario, National Parks, Camping.*—A. D. L. ROBINSON, 1163 Victoria Rd., Walkerville, Ont., Canada. **5** *Lake of Woods Region.*—R. F. LINCOLN, care of *The Minneapolis Tribune*, Minneapolis, Minn. **6** *Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C. **7** *Northern Saskatchewan, Indian life and language, hunting, trapping*—H. S. M. KEMP, 313 9th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask.

Alaska—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 1632 So. Hayworth Av., Los Angeles, Calif.

Western U. S., Part 1 *Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, care of *Adventure*. **3** *New Mexico (Indians, etc.)*—H. F. ROBINSON, 1211 W. Roma Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. **4** *Wyoming and Colorado, Homesteading, etc.*—R. P. WELLS, Box 203, Prineville, Oregon. **5** *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. **6** *Idaho and environs*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. **7** *Texas, Oklahoma.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

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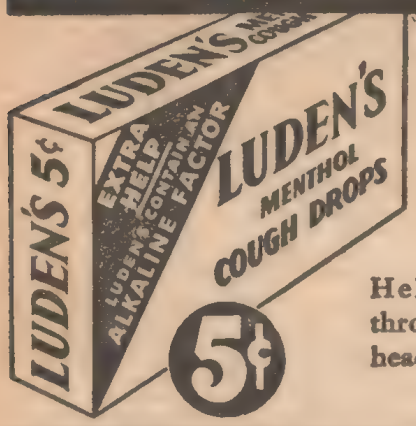

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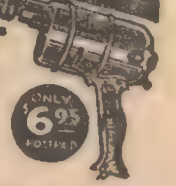

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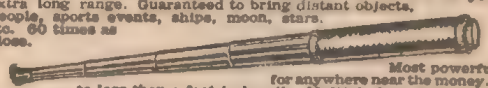

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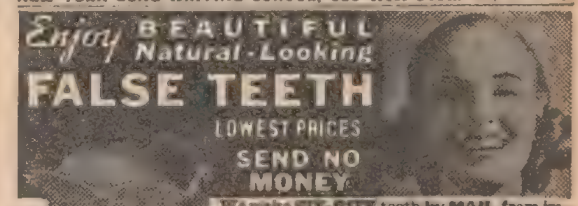

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If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada
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BILL, YOU SURE HAVE A SWELL BUILD! DID YOU TRAIN FOR A LONG TIME ?
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J. G. O'BRIEN
Atlas Champion Cup Winner
This is an ordinary snapshot of one of Charles Atlas' Californian pupils.

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MEN—meet J. G. O'Brien, of California, one of my Silver Cup Winners! A smashing example of what **my Dynamic Tension** can do! Look at that strong neck —those broad, handsome, perfectly proportioned shoulders —that muscled chest and stomach. Read what he says: "It seems only a few days ago that I mailed you that coupon. Look at me NOW! **Dynamic Tension** works like **magic. Those 7 days certainly proved you can make a fellow a NEW MAN**—right in the privacy of his own home. I'm proud of the **natural, easy way you have made me an 'Atlas Champion'!"**

This Sterling Silver Cup Being Given Away

This valuable cup stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base.

I will award it to my pupil who makes the most improvement in his development within the next three months.

YOU'LL SEE AND FEEL RESULTS IN ONE WEEK!

Do you want a prize-winning body like this? Are you fed up with having no strength, no vigor, being only HALF-ALIVE? Then listen:

That's all I ask—SEVEN DAYS! In the FIRST WEEK I'll absolutely PROVE that I can give you, too, the kind of body men respect and women admire! You will actually see and feel the improvement in even this short time. And as the weeks go by you will see yourself transformed into a NEW man—a stronger, healthier and more handsome man!

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Then I discovered the amazing secret that changed me, like magic, into "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"—the title I won twice and have held ever since, against all comers. My secret is **Dynamic Tension**, it is the **tested natural method of developing you inside and out!** It not only can give YOU the powerful, rippling muscles you'd like to see in your own mirror. . . . It also digs down into your system after such needless joy-killing conditions as ordinary constipation, pimples, indigestion, underweight and overweight.

My **Dynamic Tension** method will make a NEW MAN of you in double-quick time—and I'm ready to PROVE it to you in a 7-day TRIAL OFFER. Unless you get results in the first week it costs you absolutely NOTHING!

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Let me show you the amazing results produced for thousands of other men! I'll send you FREE my famous book, **"Everlasting Health and Strength."** It shows actual photos. It tells exactly what I can now do for your body! Write your name and address carefully on coupon. Mail to me personally **today.** I'll rush your free copy to you AT ONCE! Charles Atlas, Dept. 8312, 115 East 23 St., New York, N. Y.

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I want the proof that your system of **Dynamic Tension** will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your FREE book, "Everlasting Health and Strength," and full details about your 7-DAY TRIAL OFFER.

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LIKE humans, dogs have a complicated, highly developed set of nerves. But dogs are kinder to their nerves than we are. They rest when they need rest...while we plunge ahead with our hurry and worry —straining our nerves to keep up with the fast pace. We can't turn back to the natural life of an animal, but we *can* soothe and rest our nerves. Camel cigarettes can be your pleasant reminder to take a helpful breathing spell. Smokers find Camel's costlier tobaccos are mild, delightfully soothing—*soothing*—to the nerves.

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